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ISAAC ASIMOV'S

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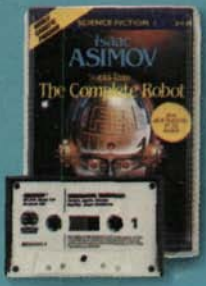

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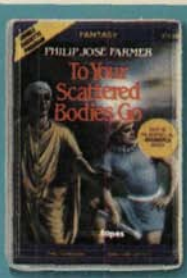

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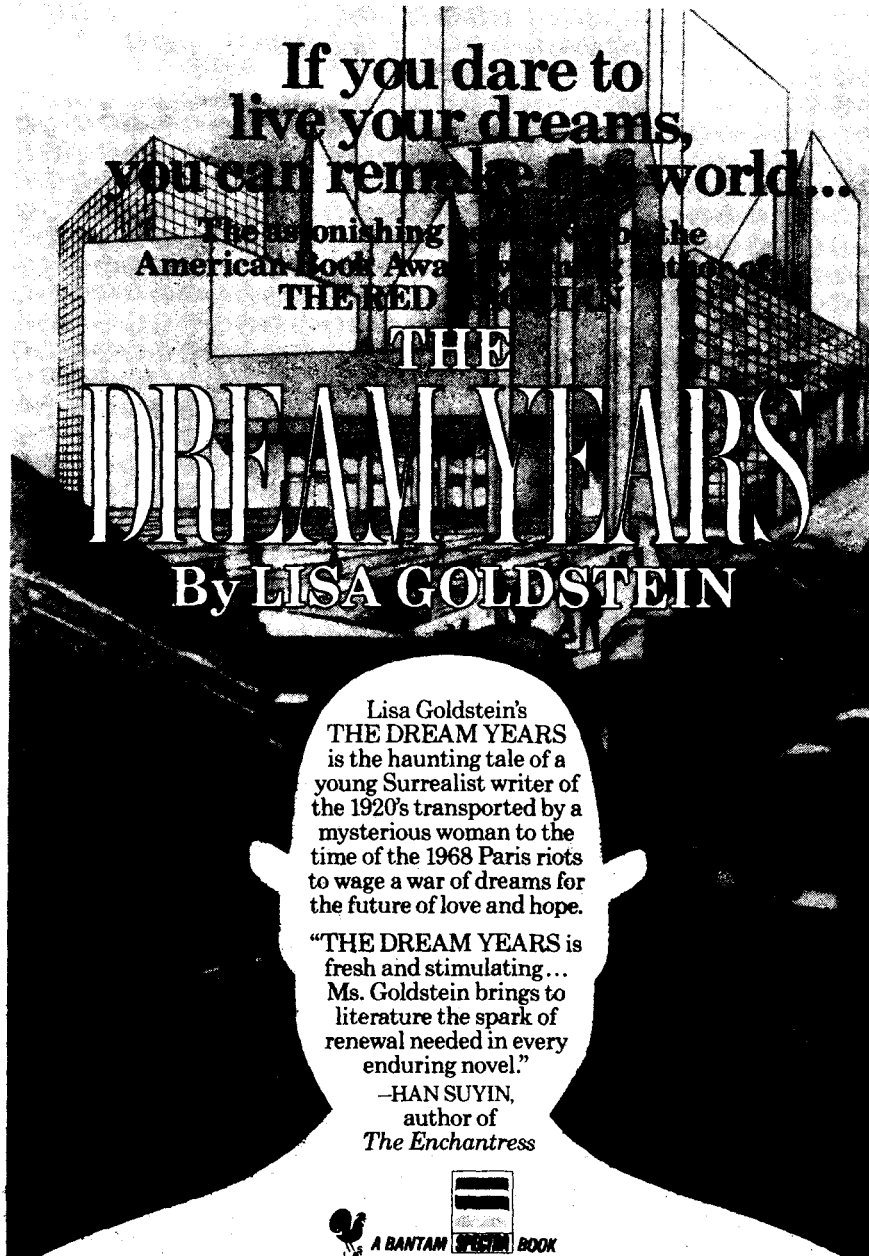

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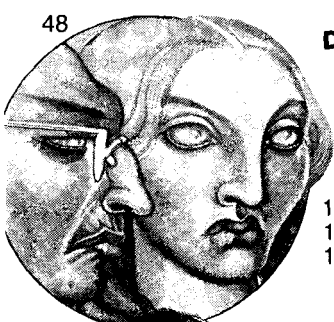

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EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

FAIRY TALES

What are "fairy tales"?

The easiest definition is, of course, that they are tales about fairies, where a fairy is a kind of imaginary being possessing many supernatural powers.

We most commonly picture fairies, in these Disneyish degenerate times of ours, as being cute little beings with butterfly wings, whose chief amusement is nestling in flowers. That, however, is a foolish narrowing of the notion. Properly fairies are *any* imaginary beings possessing many supernatural powers. Some are large and grotesque.

Therefore, stories dealing with witches, wizards, giants, ogres, jinn, afrits, baba-yagas, and many of the other creatures of legend may fairly be considered to be "fairy tales." Since the powers of such "fairies" include the granting of wishes, the casting of spells, the conversion of men into other creatures or vice-versa, fairy-tales are obviously a kind of fantasy, and some might even consider them one of the strands that went into the making of modern science fiction.

Because many fairy tales have unknown authors and were transmitted in oral form for many generations before they were written down by students of such things, and because, as a result, they lack polished literary form, they have been called "folk tales." But then some of our most beloved fairy tales have been written by known authors in comparatively modern times (for instance, "Cinderella" and "The Ugly Duckling"), so I think we had better stick to "fairy tales."

Fairy tales have always been considered suitable reading for youngsters. Adults who have forgotten them, or who have never read them in the first place, seem to think of them as charming little stories full of sweetness and light. After all, don't they all end, "And they all lived happily ever after"? So we all say, "Oh, my, wouldn't it be great if our lives were just like a fairy tale."

And we sing songs that include lines like, "Fairy tales can come true/It can happen to you . . ."

That's all nonsense, of course, for, you see, not all "fairies" are benevolent. Some are mischievous, some are spiteful, and some are

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downright wicked, so that some of the fairy tales are rough going.

This all hit home once, about a quarter of a century ago, when I was even younger than I am now. At that time, I had two young children and I was wondering what I ought to do with them, so I attended some sort of parents/teachers meeting at the local school. At that meeting, a woman rose and said, "Is there some way we can keep children from reading the awful science fiction things they put out these days. They're so frightening. Why can't they read the delightful fairy tales that *we* read when we were young?"

Of course, I wasn't as well-known in those days as I am now, so I'm sure she didn't mean it as a personal blow at me, but I reacted very promptly just the same, as you can well imagine.

I got up as though someone had shoved a long pin up through the seat of my chair and began to recite some of the plots of those delightful fairy tales.

How about "Snow White." She's a nice little girl, whose mother had died and whose father has married a beautiful woman as a second wife. The new stepmother doesn't like Snow White, and the more good and beautiful the girl comes to be, the more her stepmother doesn't like her. So stepmother orders an underling to take Snow White into the woods and *kill* her and, just as a little added attraction, she orders him to cut out her heart (after she is dead, I hope,

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though the stepmother doesn't specify) and bring it back to her as evidence.

Talk about child-abuse!

The wicked stepmother theme is a common one in fairy tales. Cinderella had one also, and two wicked step-sisters to boot, and she was mistreated by them all constantly—ill-fed, ill-dressed, ill-housed—and forced to watch those who abused her swimming in cream while she slaved away for them.

Sure both stories end happily but how many children are scarred forever by these horribly sadistic passages. How many women, innocent and good, who marry a man with children and are prepared to love and care for those children, are met with undying suspicion and hostility by those children because of the delightful fairy tales they've read.

There are wicked uncles, too. "The Babes in the Wood" is a short, all-time favorite. They are driven into the woods by their wicked uncle and starve to death there. Of course, the robins cover them with leaves, if you want to consider *that* a happy ending.

Wicked uncles were so popularized by fairy tales that they are to be found in formal literature. They make excellent villains in Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, and in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*. If you have read fairy tales and are young, I wonder if you don't view some perfectly pleasant uncle of yours with careful wariness.

Or how about "Little Red Riding Hood" in which an innocent little girl *and* her grandmother are swallowed by a wolf. Permanently, too, because if you've ever watched a wolf eat a little girl, you know that she gets torn apart. So don't believe that bit about the hunters coming and cutting open the wolf, in order to allow the kid *and* her grandmother to jump out alive. That was made up afterward by people who had watched kids going into convulsions after reading that delightful fairy tale in its original form.

My favorite, though, is *Hansel and Gretel*. Here are two perfectly charming little children who have the misfortune to have a father who is a poor woodcutter. There happens to be a famine and they run out of food. What happens? The children's mother (*not* their stepmother, but their very own mother) suggests they be taken deep into the woods and left there. In that way, there will be two less mouths to feed. Fortunately, they found their way back, to the disappointment and chagrin of their mother. Consequently, when famine struck again, the mother was right on the ball with her insistence that a second attempt be made to get rid of those little pests. This time the device is successful.

Can you imagine how much confidence this instills in any child reading the story? Thereafter, he keeps a sharp eye on the refrigerator and the pantry to see if the food is running short, for he knows who's going to be taken out to the garbage dump and left there in case the family runs short.

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But that's not the worst. In the forest, Hansel and Gretel come across a gingerbread house owned by a witch, who promptly imprisons Hansel and starts fattening him up for a feast, with him as main course. Cannibalism—just in case the kid reader didn't get enough kicks out of abandonment and starvation. Of course, it ends happily because the kids get away from the witch (killing her by burning her in an oven, of course) and come home to their loving father. Their mother (hurray, hurray) has died.

Can you imagine mothers wanting their children to read stuff like this, instead of good, wholesome science fiction? Why if we printed stories *a la* Grimm (grim, indeed) in our magazine, we'd be harried out of town by hordes of indignant citizenry.

Think of that when next you feel moved to complain about the "violence" in some of our stories. Why, they're mother's milk compared to the stuff you expect your eight-year-olds to read.

Of course, fairy tales reflect the times in which they were told. Those were hard times. Poor woodcutters were *really* poor and there was no welfare roll they could get onto. Famines were *really* famines. What's more, mothers frequently died in childbirth, and fathers had to marry again to have someone take care of the youngster. Naturally, the new wife promptly had children of her own (or had them already by an earlier husband) and any woman would favor her own children over some stranger. And fathers did die young and leave their property to an infant child and appoint a brother the guardian of both child and property. Naturally, the brother, knowing that once the child grows up and takes over the property in his own right, he himself is out on his ear, is tempted to prevent that dire possibility from coming to pass.

Nowadays with children less likely to be orphaned before they have reached the age of self-care, those plots are passé and seem needlessly sadistic. They were realistic in their own times, however.

Nevertheless, if some of the problems of the past have been ameliorated, others have cropped up. Parents are less likely to die while their children are infants; but are more likely to get divorced.

If wicked uncles are passé, wicked landlords are not. If wolves don't roam the suburbs much anymore, drug-pushers do.

Some define science fiction as "today's fairy tales." If so, you have to expect them to deal with the realistic dangers of today, but we *will* try to keep them from falling into the depths of depravity of yesterday's fairy tales. ●

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LETTERS

Dear Shawna, Dr. A., et al.:

What a lovely Xmas present your February issue was! The thing is, I don't remember ever having gotten a January issue. Do you have a January issue? Or is it perhaps replaced by the mid-December issue?

I was delighted by Michael Swanwick's story "The Transmigration of Philip K." In fact, I feel obligated to tell the man that Philip K. Dick's middle name was not Kingsley, Kamin, or even Korzinsky. It was Kindred, his mother's maiden name. Also, he was cremated and his ashes were buried at the foot of his sister's coffin, in the same grave. Jane died not at birth, but at the age of seven weeks.

It's good to see that someone cares enough to write such a brilliantly funny story and name it after Phil. It has been nearly three years since his ashes were laid to rest in Fort Morgan, Colorado. It sure is nice to know that he is remembered—hey: it just occurred to me that, with all of *IAsfm*'s readers, he must be remembered *wholesale.* (One of his best stories was "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale.")

I'm looking forward to another wonderful year of your magazine, and perhaps a few preprinted rejection slips. You see, I don't complain about them because I know about those *other* magazines, the ones that write "return to sender" on anything unsolicited or—horror of horrors—simply toss it into the circular file.

Maybe I'll even sell you a story or two, or three, or . . .

Sincerely,

Tessa B. Dick
Fullerton, CA

I don't think there is any danger of Phil Dick being forgotten for quite a while. His work is more famous now than it was during his lifetime—which doesn't entirely please me. In a decent world, a person should garner the praise he deserves while he is alive to hear and enjoy it.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Whoever Is Responsible:

Pardon my not knowing to whom this query should be addressed, but I would very much like to know why a warning was inserted at the beginning of Jim Aikin's "Statues" and not at the beginning of Elissa Malcohn's "Lazuli." Both stories were powerful and disturbing. Are we to conclude from the warning that the repeated rape of an adult female is somehow more horrible than the repeated sexual abuse

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(even if by proxy) of a child? Surely not.

I share the belief of most of your readers who responded to your poll that some sex and violence is permissible, even necessary, in adult fiction (no, science fiction is *not* "kid stuff") but I failed to find the "science" in Mr. Aikin's work, and only a minimum in Ms. Malcohn's story. Mostly, I think, I'm a bit shaken by having two such stomach-cramping stories leap up at me from the world's best science fiction magazine and one that I count on to provide me with the best entertainment every month. No, I don't think science fiction should be "escapist" but I would most sincerely appreciate it if you would refrain from hitting me in the gut quite so often and so hard.

Carole J. Rupe
Atlanta, GA

An editor's job (like a writer's) cannot always be set up according to careful, easy-stated rules. A good editor must let intuition guide her, and tell her which of two stories is more graphic and is liable to be harder to take. She may not be perfectly right for every individual reader, but she is expected to be right on the whole.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Just finished reading Pete Hamill's "From the Lake" in your latest issue and certainly did "awake with a start" when U-14 surfaced in the lake.

As chief engineer of the submarine U.S.S. S-17 early in WWII, I had two diesel engines under my cognizance. One was built by M.A.N. in Germany and had been removed from U-14 at the end of WWI after the boat was salvaged. The other was a "Chinese copy" built by the U.S. Navy. And believe me, neither one of these engines would have performed if we had tried to surface with them running, as in Mr. Hamill's story. These, sir, are air-breathing monsters which not only require copious amounts of same to continue running, but also tend to stall out with any appreciable back pressure in the exhaust system, as in outlets being below the water line significantly.

Otherwise, very enjoyable.

Sincerely,

Rue O'Neill
St. Louis, MO

In a recent article I wrote (not for this magazine) I made a careless error of 128 orders of magnitude, a world record. I am, therefore, in no position to turn my nose up at technical errors made by others. However, it is always good to be corrected. We can all use education.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy
and Dr. Asimov,

The first two things I read in the February issue were the editorial on slush and the letters from Charles Miller and Celia Friedman, chastising you for not filling out checklists when rejecting the vast majority of the material that must pour into your offices each month. It seems there are a lot of aspiring writers out there who don't like the way you folks do business. I hope that a few words in your

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behalf from an aspiring writer can help to hush up the malcontents.

Ms. McCarthy's responsibility is not to writers, established or otherwise; her responsibility is to the magazine and its readers. *IAsfm* is a business, and the idea is to put out a magazine that science fiction readers will buy. To do that, she has to produce the best magazine that she can and keep us readers happy every month. Although some seem to be unhappy over the treatment given the slush pile, I'm sure Ms. McCarthy goes through it as carefully as her time allows; if there's something good in it, she has to ferret it out lest it go to *Analog* or *Omni* and help them build their readership at the expense of hers.

I think it's ridiculous for anyone to contend that it's her responsibility to critique each story she rejects, or to feel a need for such a thing. Creative writing classes at local colleges, workshops and writers' groups abound; any would-be writer who needs constructive criticism should turn to them instead of expecting a busy editor to provide it (it was rather ironic that you published an article on the Clarion workshop in the same issue).

IAsfm offers a tremendous amount of encouragement for new writers; the notes at the beginning of each story quite often state that it is the author's first or second sale, the editorials frequently talk of an eagerness to read work from new authors, and even the masthead contains an open invitation to aspiring writers. Aspiring writers should be grateful.

Ms. McCarthy and Dr. Asimov

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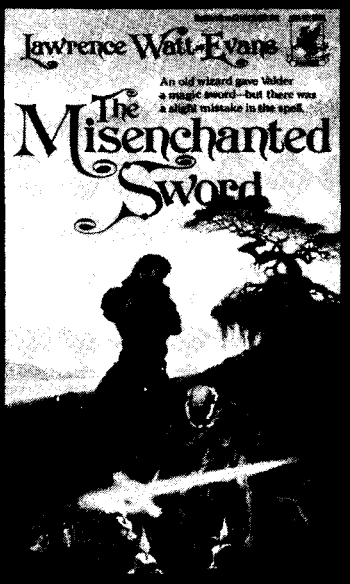
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have done a wonderful job with this magazine. The pieces that get printed every month de-emphasize the hardware and scientific speculation favored by the rest of the SF magazines on the market and depict believable and well-developed characters instead of the cardboard cutouts that are so prevalent in science fiction. It's too bad some people feel the urge to complain so much about the way they do things; they're only doing what they're supposed to do, and doing it admirably.

Christopher McKeever

The angry letters about form rejections seem to have roused a sizable number of pro-editor responses. That's very gratifying. Obviously there are two sides to this controversy—as to all others.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy
and Dr. Asimov:

I am not an editor nor am I even a published science fiction author. Yet. But I can say that somehow I sympathize with both of you.

I have received my fair share of printed, unsigned, and impersonal rejection slips. (In fact, I'm sure that I've received someone else's fair share, too.) At first I understood them to be personal slams on my writing ability and upon receiving them, I usually sulked for three or four weeks. That was when I was a teen ager.

Now I have a better understanding of what you (Shawna) have to read through—because I've forced myself to read some of my early attempts. And the SF editor was correct when she/he said, "You don't have to eat all of an egg to know it's rotten." In fact, sometimes you can smell it from quite a distance and never even have to touch it.

I wish to thank both of you for the effort you put forth to find and encourage those writers who show promise. I hope to be one of those someday (no, this is not a letter to butter you both up).

Thank you, and please know that there *is* someone out here in Rejection-slip land who appreciates both of you.

Guy Stewart
Bemidji, MN

You mustn't be too sorry for us. It's part of the game. When the magazine first started, my good friend, Ben Bova (then editor of Analog*) grinned and said, "Wait. Whatever happens, it's going to be your fault, and some reader will tell you so." So I was ready.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dr. Asimov and Shawna:

During the past year, I have read several "Letters to the Editor" complaining about the problem of removing the shipping labels from the magazine cover. I tried all of the suggested methods, but none of them seemed to work satisfactorily for me. I gave up trying seriously to remove them, but still picked at the label with each new issue in hopes that one would come off easily. Lo and behold, one finally did come off without leaving the faintest mark on the cover. Since it was a little below freezing (I had just taken the magazine from the mailbox), I wondered if

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there was any connection. So I hurried into the house and popped the latest dozen *IAsfm*'s into the freezer. After allowing them to get well cooled, I took them out (one at a time, before significant warming could occur) and carefully picked off the labels. Several came off without leaving a mark. Only one had to be put back in the freezer again before the rest of the label could be worked off.

Nolan P. Williams
Redmond, OR

It seems to me that this alone would make it worthwhile to go out and buy a freezer.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna and Dr. Asimov,

I suspect that if you did write personalized rejections, the same would-be contributors who criticize you now for staying aloof from novice-writer struggles would berate you for picky criticisms.

I worked in publishing for a while, reading unsolicited manuscripts. In three months at one house, only a single *possibly* publishable unsolicited manuscript came in. The others were terrible, not necessarily ungrammatical, but slight and derivative. Several people suggest that the first million words from a new writer are for practice—beyond that, I'd suggest the would-be writer ask him or herself some serious questions—like, would woodworking be a better creative outlet? After all, Science Fiction Writers of America has only about 600 members, while 100,000 people are professional cabinet makers.

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And if you're the irascible sort, well, encouragement will do you in. After encouragement, you worry about publication. Then there's qualifying for SFWA membership, and then you can start to be upset because you weren't nominated for the John Campbell Award, then Nebulas and Hugos disturb your sleep. Be glad not to be encouraged—saves you lots of hard work and future aggravation.

Another point, which Dr. Asimov didn't mention in his comments to letter writers, but which is mentioned in his Autobiography—his first publication was NOT with John Campbell. While Campbell spent more time with him, other editors also liked what he was doing. I suspect that any writer who gets personalized attention from an editor is also being watched by at least one other editor, who may prefer for very good reasons to avoid the inevitable thrashings of even a promising novice.

Tell Saundra Landis that many cities, Charlotte included, have wonderful amateur to semi-pro SF groups, some of whom have been published professionally. Trying to get help from famous people is a bit weird—I suspect that Dr. Asimov made Campbell famous as much as Campbell made Asimov into a good writer. Campbell was just a novice SF editor when Asimov met him.

Rebecca Brown
Charlotte, NC

I can't say that I made Campbell famous. He had become famous in the SF world when I was still a third-class writer. However, I believe I have written about *him more than anyone else and that helps keep his memory alive.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac:

Ms. Athey's complaint in the March issue seems to call for just a little more comment than even your well-turned reply, so:

Oops! There *is* a *fine* novel dealing with "scatologic implications" of differences between the toilet training of humans and an alien species. I refer to Brian Aldiss's *The Dark Light Years*, first published in Fred Pohl's magazine *Worlds of Tomorrow* in April 1964. In "You Sane Men," Lawrence M. Janifer dealt with S&M, and in "Sardonyx Net" Elizabeth Lynn wrote about slavery with great imagination and sensitivity. And even conservative grand master Heinlein can write a story casting Jehovah as a minor spoiled brat. Truly, the SF community, as a whole, is fearless, and I'm proud to be part of it. *Everything* is the province of "serious literature," and it is thanks to the works of these pioneers, and many others, that SF *is* now considered such.

None of the above-mentioned sex, dirt, and heresy (catchy phrase, that) was gratuitous, and we owe all the editors who have expanded our field with such works a tremendous thank you.

Richard Blair
Grantham, NH

Well, I once wrote a story in which mother love was portrayed as obscene. I also wrote a third of a novel once which dealt, in detail,

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with troilism. Anyway, thank you for the information.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor,

I was very impressed with Ben Bova's story in your February, 1985 issue. "Primary" is the best "future of the presidency" story I have read in a long time. One comparable in quality and style was the story about the game show, the winner of which became president. And the concept was nearly plausible. I could almost believe that someday this country might evaluate a president based on his actual capabilities.

The "behind every good man is a better computer program" idea was dealt with on a more positive note than is usual. But that isn't too terribly futuristic; it has been said already that the president is less likely to order the start of World War III than a faulty computer chip.

But what really struck me was the ending with the "White House Computer" itself evaluating the new program. What an incredible program that would have to be, to reliably judge it's own replacement. Could Ronald Reagan have fairly judged the capabilities of Walter Mondale? And could any such evaluation reasonably be kept secret?

Congratulations to Mr. Bova for rising to the heights of quality necessary for *IAsfm* publication. And congratulations to *IAsfm* for acquiring such an excellent story.

Sincerely,

David B. Smith
Duluth, MN

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Oh, I don't know. Ben Bova is a swell guy. I think the magazine is to be congratulated for rising to the heights of getting a story from him.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna, the Good Doctor and the rest:

I received the February *IAsfm* on

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New Year's Eve and I have simply loved it! Robert Silverberg's "Sailing to Byzantium" is marvelous, one of the best stories your magazine has ever published, and, I think, a contender for a Hugo or a Nebula. Do you expect any more stories from Mr. Silverberg? (I hope so!) Marta Randall's "Undeniably Cute: A Cautionary Tale" was *strange,* but enjoyable. As usual Baird Searles' "On Books" was delightful, keep up the good work! The Good Doctor's Editorials and responses to letters are great, you show 'em, Doc! I am curious as to how Isaac received his "Doctor" honorific. Does he hold a Ph.D. in something?

I am in total agreement with the Good Doctor's stand on the printed rejection slip. I received one such slip and, while it was disappointing, I understand the need for this. (I certainly wouldn't want to have the job of dishing out personal critiques for all the stories in the slush pile!) And, I don't understand why those people get so upset at getting a photocopied rejection slip, is it that great a personal tragedy? Really, some people go *Overboard!* about this. The Good Doctor is right, Shawna's job is that of EDITOR not INSTRUCTOR, people who want to be TAUGHT should go to school.

Keep up the flip responses and *Please,* MORE stories and novels!!

Another thing, I was wondering why *IAsfm* magazine doesn't serialize novels?

Thank you,

Scott McCrea
387 Vance St. Apt B
Chula Vista, CA 92010

I'm a real "doctor," though I'm not a medical man. I've got a Ph.D. in chemistry. I'm also "honorific." At least, I've got fourteen honorary doctorates so far. That's all I have accepted. I don't travel, so offers from further than a couple of hundred miles from New York get rejected.

—Isaac Asimov

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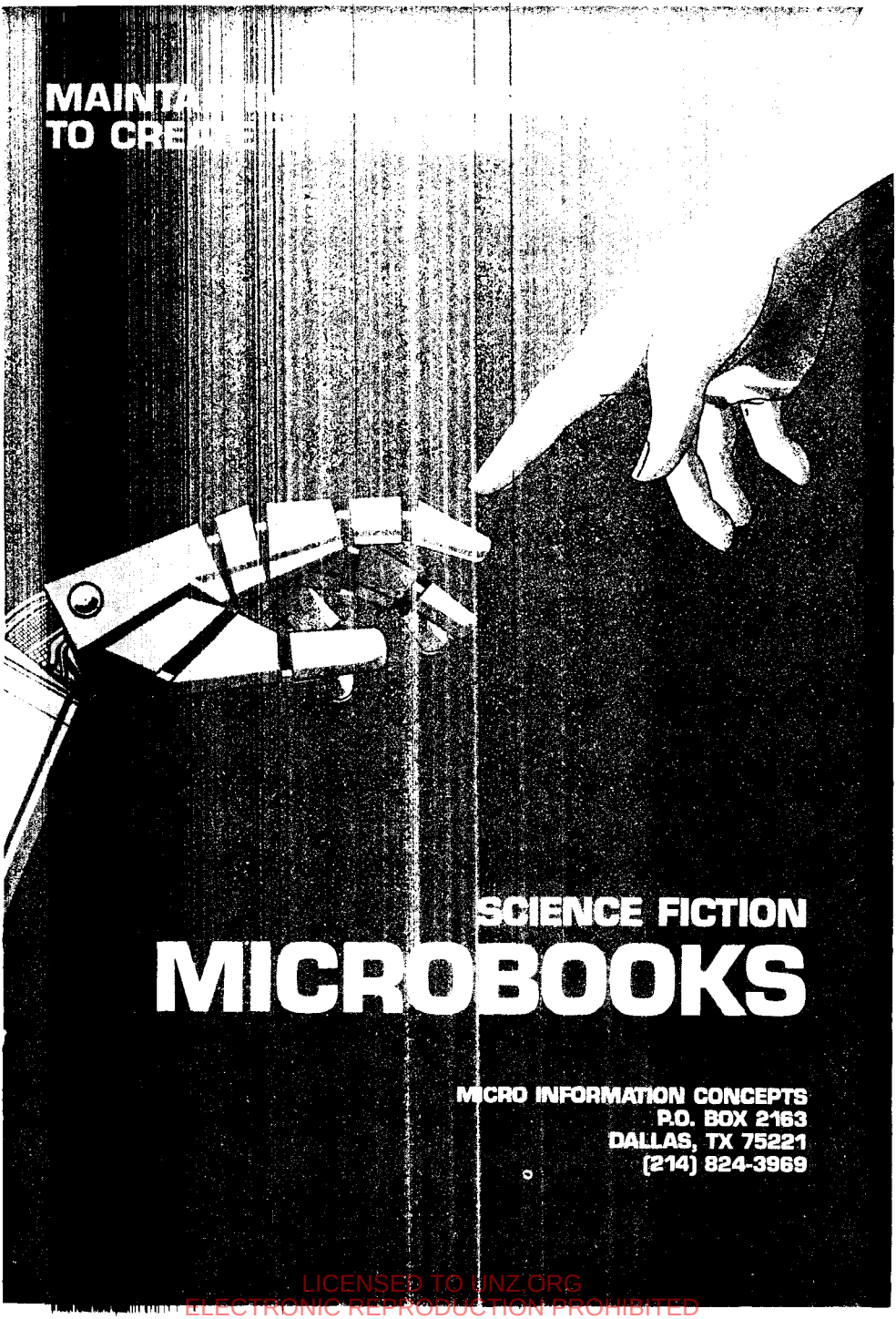

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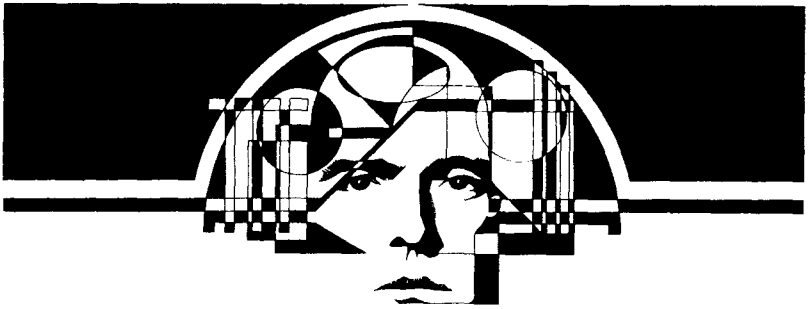
MARTIN GARDNER

PUZZLES IN FLATLAND



In Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (Chapter 18) we learn about Hexanerax 2:.

> The planet was absolutely flat. Its enormous gravity had long ago crushed into one uniform level the mountains of its fiery youth—mountains whose mightiest peaks had never exceeded a few meters in height. Yet there was life here, for the surface was covered with a myriad geometrical patterns that crawled and moved and changed their color. It was a world of two dimensions, inhabited by beings who could be no more than a fraction of a centimeter in thickness.

Is it possible that intelligent life actually could evolve in a two-dimensional world? If the unreality of absolutely flat shapes troubles you, think of them (as in Clarke's description) as having an extremely small thickness, like cardboard shapes sliding about on a flat surface.

Until a few years ago it was assumed that no flat world could be physically real. Edwin Abbott had written his famous novel *Flatland* in 1884, and Charles Hinton in 1907 constructed a more plausible planar universe in *An Episode of Flatland*, subtitled "How a plane folk discovered the third dimension." Both novels were amusing fantasies. No one took seriously the notion that life in any form, let alone intelligent life, could possibly flourish in a two-space universe.

The bombshell came in 1979 when Alexander Keewatin Dewdney, a computer scientist at the University of Western Ontario, published his

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surprising monograph on *Two-Dimensional Science and Technology*. In it he showed in astonishing detail how it was logically possible for a two-space world to exist—a universe with a solar system, laws of physics, atomic matter, earthlike weather, intelligent life, and machines that could do almost anything our machines do. My column about this in *Scientific American* (July 1980) produced a flood of letters, many from top scientists, with hundreds of ingenious suggestions about flat technology.

Drawing on this material, and adding more ideas of his own, Dewdney wrote one of the most amazing tours de force in the history of science fiction: a novel called *The Plainverse* (Poseidon, 1984). This richly illustrated, funny book tells how the author and his students made computer contact with a two-dimensional being named Yendred. (Change the *r* to *w* and you get Dewdney backward.) Yendred eventually provided a detailed account of Arde, a circular planet on the rim of which he lives. Dewdney, by the way, now writes the Computer Recreations department of *Scientific American*. He was one of many mathematicians who spoke last October at Brown University, at a symposium on "Flatland: Visualizing Higher Dimensions," organized by Thomas Banchoff of Brown's mathematics department.

We three-space creatures find it convenient to play mathematical games on paper or two-dimensional boards. It's only natural to assume

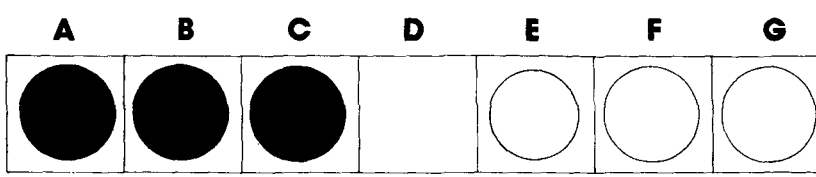

Figure 1

that flatlanders would find it convenient to play their games on "boards" of one dimension—that is, on lines. Surprisingly, many of our traditional games have nontrivial one-space analogs. In his novel, Dewdney introduces one-dimensional go, and in my column on the planiverse I discussed linear forms of checkers and chess. Even linear ticktacktoe (TTT) is not trivial. Of course flatlanders could not make crosses or circles on a line, but they could distinguish the two marks by making one line segment long and the other short, or by using pencils of two colors or counters of different colors or shapes.

So far as I know, linear TTT has never been fully analyzed. It is played on a finite row of *n* cells, players alternating *X*s and *O*s, and the first to get three of his marks in a row is the winner. I may discuss this in a future column. The second player cannot win if both sides play their best,

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but he can always force a draw. This is true also if the game is played in reverse—first to get three in a row loses.

If both players use the *same* mark, say *X*, it is called one-color TTT. Draws are obviously impossible. The first player can win on all boards with an odd number of cells by taking the middle cell then playing symmetrically opposite each of his opponent's moves until he sees a chance to win. But if the board has *even* length the game is extremely difficult to analyze in normal form, and the reverse form on all boards (even or odd) is even worse. Winners have been determined by computer programs for boards of small length, but a general strategy (if there is one) remains undiscovered for the normal game on even boards and the reverse game on all boards.

According to Yendred, flatlanders have hundreds of traditional counter-moving puzzles that use a linear "board." Consider, for example, the row of seven cells shown in Figure 1. Put three pennies on cells *A, B, C* as shown, and three dimes on *E, F, G*. You are allowed to move in one of two ways: either *slide* to an adjacent empty cell in either direction, or *jump* (as in checkers) in either direction to an empty cell immediately beyond. Jumped pieces are not removed. The task is to make the dimes and pennies change places in the fewest number of moves.

The minimum possible is 15. See if you can make the exchange in 15 moves before looking at the solution on page 72.

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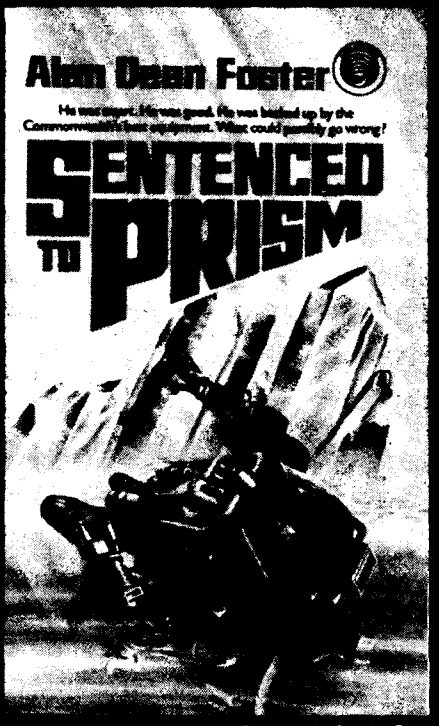

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GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

The Computer is your friend. Trust The Computer. You, as a loyal servant of The Computer, must search for and terminate traitors, such as mutants and members of secret societies. Unfortunately, you are a mutant and a member of a secret society. Won't this be fun?

Paranoia is perhaps the strangest role-playing game ever published ($17.00 at your local store, or direct from West End Games Inc., 251 W. 30th St., New York, NY 10001). Set in a darkly humorous future, the game drops you into an underground society controlled by The Computer, an insane machine that believes everyone is out to get it. Everyone—absolutely everyone—is a potential traitor. Your teammates are probably all traitors. You are definitely a traitor (you're not given any other option). Now if you can just hide this fact from The Computer and the other players, you may survive—for a while.

Along with the usual role-playing character attributes of Strength, Manual Dexterity, Agility, Endurance, and Mechanical Aptitude, there are some new categories in *Paranoia*: Moxie (the ability to understand new phenomena and choose the right course of action); Power Index (the measure of a character's mutant powers); and Chutzpah; (the characteristic which allows a person to kill his parents and beg the court for mercy because he's an orphan).

All of these Primary Characteristics are then used to determine Secondary Characteristics. For example, Strength determines Carrying Capacity, Chutzpah determines Believability Bonus, and Endurance determines Macho Bonus (the ability to shrug off a laser-blasted arm as "just a flesh wound").

Players' characters also have skills in Combat, Vehicle Services, Technical Services, and surviving in Hostile Environments. There is also a category of skills called Personal Development which includes such talents as bribery, intimidation, and bootlicking.

The illustrations in the rulebooks do a lot to set the tone of this game. A "formal execution" consists of a half dozen people blasting away at a fleeing figure. A patient with a small cut on his forehead is attended to by a malfunctioning medical robot equipped with a chainsaw. The same illustration that appears in one book often appears again in other books, but with different captions, depending on The Computer's viewpoint at the moment.

It should be obvious by now that *Paranoia* is a role-playing satire —but one you can really play. I don't want to use the term "seri-

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ous" gaming, since you shouldn't become too attached to your character. He'll probably be blown away—and for some ridiculous reason. But this is the only game I've played in which you'll laugh at how you're eliminated from the game.

The rules state: "Stay alert. Trust no one. Keep your laser handy." That's good advice for you and what's left of humanity now residing in underground cities like Alpha Complex. Numerous subcults known as secret societies proliferate in this future world. Some of them cooperate with each other while others work against each other; all of them are a little strange. For example, the Sierra Club wants to return humanity to its natural environment—the surface of Earth—while the First Church of Christ Computer Programmers wants to serve The Computer and modify it so humanity and machines live in perfect harmony.

The laser pistols, sonic rifles, and other weapons in *Paranoia* are potent, so the chances of survival in a battle are slim. Unlike most role-playing games in which the player's characters have a better than average chance of survival in gun fights, referrees are told to expect a 50 to 100 percent casualty rate among characters in any given adventure in *Paranoia*. To offset this high mortality rate, each player has six clones of his character. When one clone is vaporized, the next one is immediately activated (you'll use a lot of clones).

You're not permitted much time to think about your character's actions during play. If you hesitate in responding to a question or situation description by the referee, it's assumed that your character has hesitated. This is frequently fatal.

This results in a lot of action and surprise that can sometimes be missing from other role-playing games because of the caution exercised by experienced players. Experienced gamers usually have learned to look before they leap in order to keep their characters alive to participate in future adventures. *Paranoia's* rapid pace, high mortality rates, and general silliness is extremely refreshing.

In one of the adventures I participated in, one of my fellow "loyal servants of the computer" fired at an indentified traitor, an admirable thing to do. Unfortunately he missed the traitor and hit and vaporized a very valuable autocar we had been sent to retrieve. Realizing that we would all be viewed as traitors for this action, I immediately screamed, "He's a traitor!" and shot him in the back. Bad aim is traitorous. (I received a commendation from The Computer.)

Paranoia is a game that rewards quick thinking and, well, paranoia. It's meant to be fun and humorous, although not everyone may appreciate this type of satire. I enjoy playing it often—but then I happen to have a warped sense of humor. If you enjoy Catch-22 situations and don't mind seeing your character(s) frequently eliminated, you'll enjoy playing *Paranoia*. ●

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VIEWPOINT

THE MAD SCIENTIST'S PRIMER

art: J.K. Potter

by Tom Rainbow

"The Mad Scientist's Primer" is the last of our Viewpoints by the late Tom Rainbow. In many ways this is also his most delightful article, and the enjoyment one garners from it underscores the true extent to which Tom's untimely death is a loss to the science fiction community. We deeply regret that we will no longer have the opportunity to showcase Tom's work.

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VIEWPOINT

Role models are important to us scientists. By and large, we are an intellectually insecure group, and it helps to emulate specific individuals. Many of my colleagues, for instance, grew up wanting to be Marie Curie or Albert Einstein. Occasionally, someone will want to be Loni Anderson, but this can usually be treated.

Me? Well, I have some problems modeling my career after a guy like Einstein. I mean, there was something wrong with the man. Here was one of the greatest scientific minds in history, who could have very easily built an atomic bomb in 1910. (Stealing the U-235 from Marie Curie.) He could have then blackmailed Europe for *billions.* Made Isadora Duncan his queen, and ruled the *world.* With his incredible knowledge of special and general relativity, he could have built hyperspace drives, dimensional transports, anti-matter rays, and conquered the *galaxy.* He could have teamed up with the Klingons and become master of the *universe.* Instead, he *gave away* his findings, publishing them in a non-paying scientific journal with a readership about 0.0001 percent that of this magazine. He then accepted a low-paying faculty position, where he had to teach *undergraduates,* no less. And they called him a genius.

My scientific heroes are more practical men: the hideous Dr. Phibes, the abominable Dr. Moreau, the depraved Dr. Jekyll, the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu, the inhumane Dr. Frankenstein, the perverted Dr. Lex Luthor, and the criminally insane Dr. Victor Von Doom. Men who'd rather turn an undergraduate into a Hostess Twinkie than to teach him or her second-semester physics. Men who would conquer the world in a trice if it weren't for meddlesome do-gooders like James Bond or the Fantastic Four. Such talented, competent individuals are often referred to as "Mad Scientists," a term undoubtedly concocted by envious, less intelligent peers. While my colleagues dream of winning Nobel Prizes and accepting endowed chairs at Harvard, I dream of building a shrinking ray and putting the entire city of Pittsburgh into a bottle in my laboratory. Or better

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yet, to put *Harvard* in a bottle, a dirty one that has left-over soda in it.

In the old days, to be a Mad Scientist merely involved doing your Ph.D. work with Dr. Jekyll and a post-doctoral fellowship with Dr. Frankenstein. Afterwards, you'd accept an assistant professorship in the Demonology department at the University of Transylvania, and happily spend your evenings and weekends turning undergraduates into Hostess Twinkies. Now, it's harder. Dr. Jekyll is an executive vice president of Genentech. Dr. Frankenstein won a MacArthur fellowship and is writing the "Amateur Scientist" column for *Scientific American*. And given the current shortage of academic positions, it's tough to get an assistant professorship at the Trenton State College of Mortuarial Science, let alone at the University of Transylvania. Also, the bottom has sort of dropped out of the Twinkie market. Does this mean that the Mad Scientist will soon go the way of the trilobite, the pterodactyl and the "Newlywed Game"? Nope. Let me describe how any bright young Ph.D., who has a latent desire to transfer his or her roommate's mind into the body of a hamadryad Baboon can make a well-paying, satisfying living as a Mad Scientist. But first, let me finish my *experiment*, heh! heh! heh! *Twinkies,* anyone?

Getting Started

First of all you have to be mad, or at least sort of leaning that way. Ask yourself some key questions: Do you look at your roommate and say to yourself "My! Wouldn't he make a handsome baboon!" Have you ever tried to order an anti-matter bomb from the Sears catalog? Do you experiment on your pets? If the answer to any of these is yes, or better yet, "Yes!-Ha!-Ha!-You-Fool!-Soon-the-Universe-will-be-mine!," then, congratulations, you qualify. Second, you have to be a scientist. Usually, this means having a Ph.D. One gets these little initials by going to graduate school. This is a 3–5 year apprenticeship where you do research under the supervision of a scientist. It culminates in the writing of a zillion ($10^{\text{arrgh!}}$) page

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VIEWPOINT

thesis about your research. The most critical part of your Ph.D. thesis is the width of the *margins*. The margin requirements of my university were used by the Physics department as an extremely exact test of the predictions of General Relativity. Deviate by as much as an angstrom and it's back to seventh grade. Flunking the margin requirement is why Lex Luthor turned to Evil. Also, all pages must be consecutively numbered (ascending order, wise guy!) and free of pizza stains. There are no pop-up pictures of Luke Skywalker or centerfolds of Marie Curie and forget about selling the rights to ABC for possible use as a made-for-TV movie, unless it has something to do with incest or child-molesting.

Do you really need a Ph.D. to be a scientist? Not always. Outside of numerous honorary degrees, Einstein never had one. Science is basically a meritocracy. If you could perform as a scientist without a Ph.D., then, generally, you would be accepted as a scientist. As in the case of Einstein, who worked on physics in his off-hours when he was a patent clerk, this would mean publishing articles in obscure scientific journals (*Journal of Obscurism, Obscure Results, Obscure*) which typically have readerships that number in the high twos or the low threes. *Anyone* can publish in these journals. No Ph.D. required. They work like this: Send the article to the editor. He or she sends it to the scientific advisory board, and if they approve the science, you're in. Some important facts about these journals: They are *not* available at your local newsstand or supermarket check-out counter, so don't bother to ask for the *Journal of Molecular Neuroendocrinology* or *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* at the same retailer where you buy *Family Circle* or *Gent*. Nor will you be *paid* anything for publishing an article in these journals. In fact, often you pay them to offset the cost of printing.* The prestigious

*In fact, given my academic background, I thought it was perfectly reasonable to pay page charges for *Asimov's*, until the kind editor of *Analog*, himself an academic, pointed out that they were supposed to pay *me*. Oh. Also, that probably means I shouldn't have bought that nice piece of real estate in the Second Foundation or those 1000 shares of U.S. Robots and Mechanical Men.

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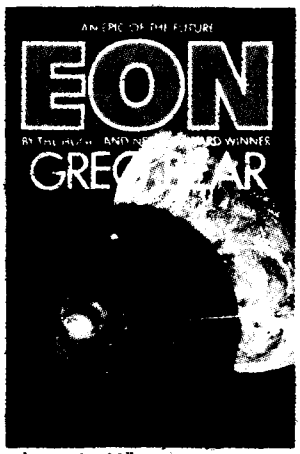

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VIEWPOINT

"My scientific heroes are more practical men: the hideous Dr. Phibes, the abminable Dr. Moreau, the depraved Dr. Jekyll, the insidious Dr. Fu Man Chu, the inhumane Dr. Frankenstein, the perverted Dr. Lex Luthor, and the criminally insane Dr. Victor Von Doom. Men who'd rather turn an undergraduate into a Hostess Twinkie than to teach him or her second semester physics."

Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences is required by law to say "The publication costs of this article were defrayed in part by page charge payment. This article must therefore be hereby marked *advertisement* in accordance with 18 U.S.C. § 1734, solely to indicate this fact." The one time I published something in *PNAS*, my more jovial colleagues suggested that I might be arrested for false advertising. Ha. Ha. Ha. Pretty funny for a bunch of future Twinkies.

Although it's not absolutely necessary to have a Ph.D. to be a scientist, for those of us who aren't Einstein, it's a faint bit of solace in the otherwise dismal appraisal of our likely contributions to human knowledge. Besides, "Mad Mister Rainbow" doesn't have quite the same ring to it. Let us assume that the modern Mad Scientist will have a Ph.D. Frankly, if *I* got one, *you* can get one. What else do you need to become a Mad Scientist? Well, you'll need *money*. *Lots* of money. For example, I run a small laboratory that deals with mundane-type questions about brain chemistry, the *raison d'etre* to someday cure

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neurological and psychiatric diseases. It's *expensive*. It takes roughly $100,000 a year to operate my lab. About 60 percent of this goes for salaries, and the rest goes for consumable supplies and chemicals. In order for me to do my research, I need about $100,000 worth of equipment. I also need a laboratory, with chemical-resistant table-tops, fume-hoods, distilled water, etc. My laboratory is about 800 square feet. It was built recently, at a cost of about $100,000. Just to keep a punky operation like mine in business requires $200,000 in start-up costs and $100,000 a year for operational expenses. As I'll discuss below, Mad Science is likely to be even more expensive. Some of my money comes from private foundations and some from my university, but the majority comes from the U.S. government, specifically from the National Institute of Health.

I get this money by submitting outlines of proposed research to the National Institute of Health. The last one I wrote was about 20 single-spaced pages long, with the esoteric title "Computerized Densitometry of Neurochemicals." The research proposal is reviewed by a committee of scientists. If they think it's worthwhile, and if the NIH budget is in good shape that year, then I'll get my $100,000. This might be 2×10^{-4} of the total NIH budget. It goes without saying that my chances for research funding would be a lot smaller if I wrote a proposal with the title, "Molecular Biophysics Underlying Transmogrification of Ivy League Undergraduates into Common Emuscables: Ring-a-Dings, Devil Dogs, and *Twinkies*."

Well, could we, say, write a conventional goody-goody science proposal, and then, uh, *liberate* the money for Mad Science? Once we get our $100,000 grant, what's to stop us from ordering a baboon, a mind-transfer machine, and a big banner to greet our roommate that says "HELLO, MR. MONKEY!!," instead of all those dull old test-tubes?

Regrettably, the money is administered by my university, and the restrictions on its use are pretty severe. To get the research grant, you have to give the scientific review panel a detailed budget. Legally, I can't buy anything that's not in the budget,

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which is unlikely to have money set aside for a mind-transfer machine. What if the university were in on the scheme? You could imagine that the University of Transylvania would be only too happy to buy me all the mind-transfer machines I wanted. The problem there is that the government will occasionally audit universities to make sure that they don't misapply research funds. Usually, they're looking for abuses like using my research grant money to buy new sherry glasses for the English department, but they would certainly notice if a couple of mind-transfer machines were bought under the counter—those things are not going to be cheap.

If the university is caught misusing federal research funds, it can lose all of its federal funding. For the University of Transylvania, this would mean a cutoff in such things as the Remedial English program for Vampires, the combined Pre-Schooler Day Care Center/Werewolf Hot Lunch Program, the combined Home For Wayward Girls/Werewolf Hot Lunch Program, and all sorts of other worthy projects. This would result in a serious decline in the quality of life at the University of Transylvania, defined as a good portion of the faculty being killed and eaten by werewolves.

Let us say that it is unlikely that we can obtain funds for Mad Science from such government science agencies as the National Science Foundation or the National Institute of Health. Well, thank God for the *Defense Department!* These days, they have more money for research than any other portion of the government, and they have traditionally backed Mad Science. I would call particle beam weapons and laser battlestars mad science, wouldn't you? Consider what will happen when the DOD is made aware of the presently-growing *Twinkie* gap. There is a very real possibility that millions of Americans could end up as TV snacks for borchst-breathed, devil-faced *commies*, who would just love to turn little Jimmie or Susie into a small yellow cream-filled cake wrapped in cellophane! What's the solution? *Billions* to start a crash program in the molecular biophysics of emuscable transmogrification, leading to

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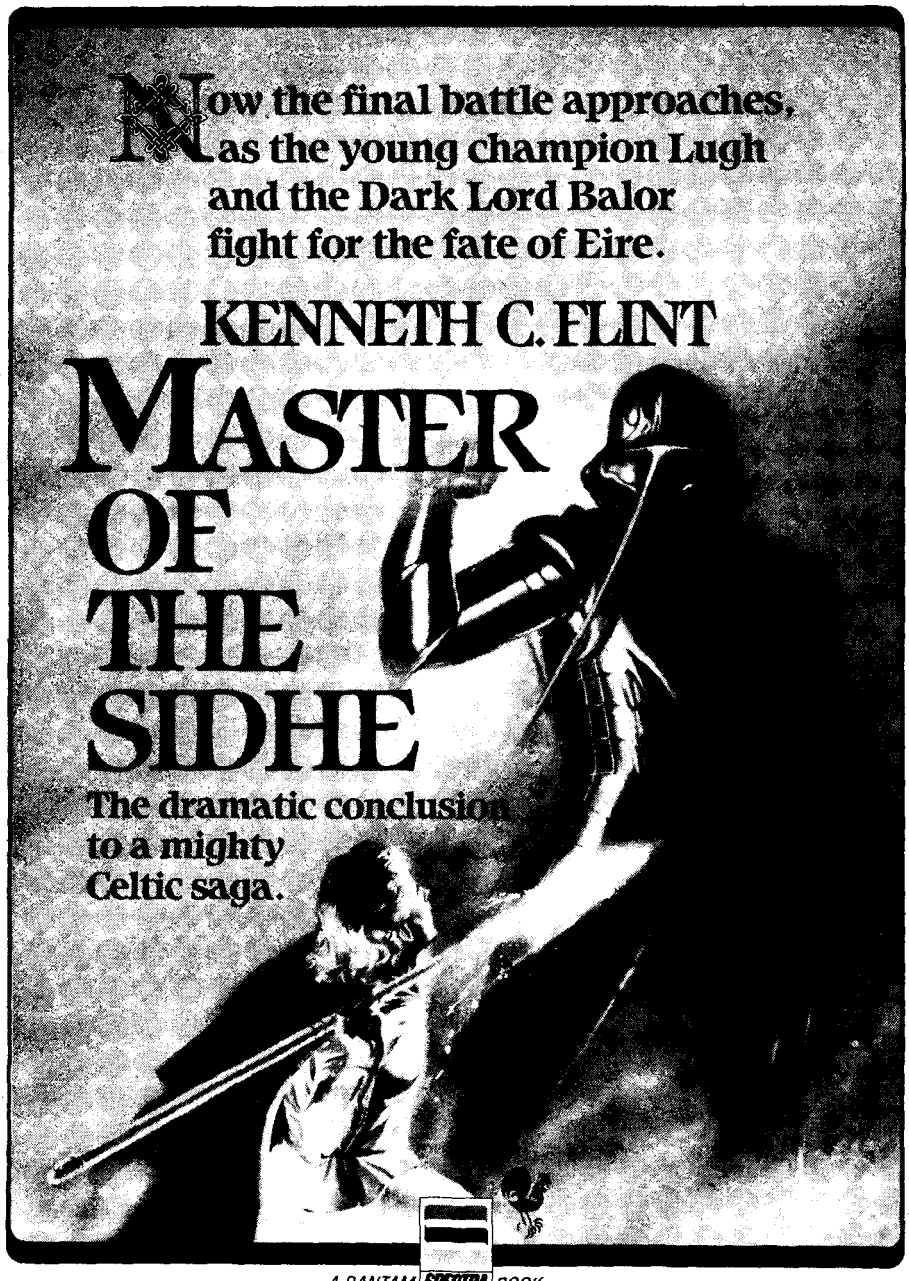

A BANTAM SPECTRA BOOK

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development of an American *Twinkie* ray. And lucky me, sitting here with a grant already written on that very same topic, and undergraduates galore waiting to become the very essence of junk food. I get my grant, the Defense Department gets its Twinkie ray, and lots of pre-med jerks wearing Walkmen and listening to the Police become small yellow cream-filled cakes.

The only problem is that the Defense Department tends to *classify* everything. Make any progress in building a Twinkie ray, and you'll spend the rest of your life in that mythical underground research lab in Nevada, living on nothing but bread and Twinkies. Any organization that wants to conquer the world itself is not going be stupid enough to let you beat it to it. You may as well get research support from the Mafia, which probably has almost as much money. Let us rule out the Defense Department as a source of funds, unless the Mad Science we want to do is the conventional kill-lotsa-commies kind. That leaves two places, both of which look good. The first and easiest is your own money, assuming you're rich. That $100,000 a year that it takes to run my lab is bus fare for guys like Donald Trump or Steven Spielberg. Let's say that the net worth of Steven Spielberg is 100 million dollars, probably an underestimate, given the success of his movies. Let's say that his yearly income is 10 percent of his net worth or 10 million dollars. Therefore, $100,000 would be one percent of his yearly income. He could take an R&D tax-credit on the money, so he'd actually only be spending half this amount, or 0.5 percent of his yearly income. An average starting salary for an assistant professor at my university might be $30,000. One-half of one percent of this would be $150, about the price of a home video game. Therefore, it's about as taxing for the likes of Steven Spielberg to finance my lab as it is for the likes of me to buy a home video game. According to *Forbes* magazine, which publishes an annual list, there are roughly 1000 people in the United States with net worths in excess of $100 million. As I alluded earlier, true Mad Science will be considerably more expensive than a paltry

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$100,000 a year, but having Spielberg-esque bucks certainly makes it a lot more affordable. What if you're not worth $100 million, and you have no immediate prospects of directing the next six Indiana Jones films? Well, then, just like the old alchemists, you get a *patron*. For example:

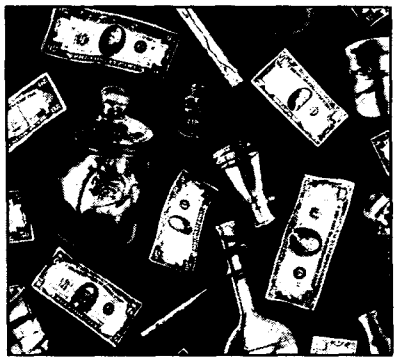
Scene: The slovenly, closet-sized office of Dr. T.C. Rainbow. Papers are scattered everywhere. Any remaining space is occupied by half-drunk cardboard cups of vending machine coffee. Somewhere, the phone is ringing.

RAINBOW: (*clawing through the papers)* Darn it! Gee! Gosh! Where the jeepers is that thing? *(He finds it, knocking over several cups of coffee in the process)* Hello? Professor Rainbow, speaking.

(*The theme to "E.T." can be heard over the phone*)

RAINBOW: Steverino! How's show business, baby! Give any good meetings, ha! ha! ha!

SPIELBERG: Shut up, you asshole, and listen! Plan "C" is now in operation. Pauline Kael just trashed "Indiana Jones and the Blood-Demons of Gore."



"Another important point is *never experiment on yourself.* That is what undergraduates are for. Test that matter-transmitter device on yourself and you'll be known as "Flyface" to your colleagues. The more you think that neat, new potion is going to make you immortal, the more likely it is that you're going to become a Giant Turtle Monster. Sometimes, it's really hard to anticipate all of the subtle side-effects. Unless you want the National Guard firing Stinger missles at your scaly back as you lay your eggs in lower Manhattan, stick to giving Jimmie-Bob and Carol-Sue extra-credit for doing volunteer work in your lab."

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VIEWPOINT

Baboon her!

RAINBOW: Anything you say, Stevie baby! Bet you're calling from the old hot tub with some starlet, eh? Give any good meetings, ha! ha! ha!

SPIELBERG: Asshole! (*He hangs up*)

RAINBOW: (*Searching the floor, spilling yet more coffee*) Let's see, where did I put Plan "C?" Ah! Here it is! (*Blots coffee from document and reads aloud*) "Human-Hamadryad Baboon Mind-Transfer Experiment. S. Spielberg to pay all costs. Do not exceed projected box-office grosses from *E.T.*, *Indiana Jones*, and *Star Wars* sequels and/or $10 billion." Okay, Steverino, let's make a lower primate outta that *New Yorker* dame! When I get through, she'll be writing her reviews in banana-flavored ink, ha! ha! ha! (*He exits to laboratory*)

Yes, well, coffee-cups aside, could such a thing be done for even 10 billion dollars? This, I think, is the whole crux of being a Mad Scientist. You have to be able to do things that are 10–100 years more advanced than current technology. I believe that mind-transfer is theoretically possible (see "The Feasibility of Mind-Transfer" June '83, *IAsfm*). Basically, it requires a more detailed knowledge of the human brain than we now have, the ability to monitor and manipulate individual synapses in a human brain, plus a very sophisticated computer to handle the 10^{15} bits of information in a human brain. I estimated that the necessary scientific information and technology would become available in 20–50 years. On what did I base this estimate? Well, things have changed a *lot* over the past twenty years. In 1964, there were no microprocessors, no consumer electronics to speak of, no coronary bypasses, no CAT scans, the genetic code had only been broken for a couple days, "quark" was just a strange word from *Finnegans Wake*, the steady-state theory of the Universe seemed to be right—a very different place with respect to science and technology. Now, if we go back to *1934*, there were no computers of any kind, no solid-state electronics, no television, no molecular biology, no birth-control pills (shudder!), large parts of the United States were

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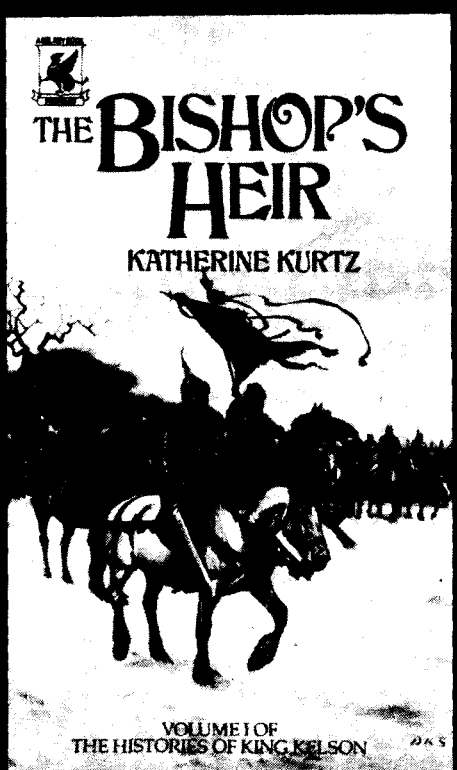

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without electricity or indoor plumbing. . . . No wonder Indiana Jones roamed the world—there wasn't much else to do. To use an example of Arthur C. Clarke's, what if an advanced piece of 1980s technology would suddenly materialize in the 1930s? Say, a MacIntosh computer or a compact-disk stereo-system. Computers? Lasers? Light-emitting diodes? Nothing on the inside but a bunch of wires connected to strange little roach-like boxes, containing thin wafers with very complicated patterns engraved on them? After examination by the top 1930s scientists, like Einstein, it is more likely that they would conclude these things originated *500* years in the future, rather than 40 or 50.

The point is, simply, that science and technology tend to grow exponentially—the more you start with, the faster the rate of change. Given the normal course of things—a certain, non-declining fraction of the GNP going to research and development, a certain percentage of the population becoming scientists and engineers—you will inevitably wind up with things like mind-transfer machines. Now, to become a Mad Scientist, we have to accelerate this process, targeting for rapid development certain areas that have particularly fiendish applications. Presumably, we could do this by spending large amounts of money. If I really had a billion-dollar blank check, could I develop a mind-transfer machine? Well, not by myself, but maybe I could assemble a team of scientists and engineers that could. Sort of a fiendish version of the Manhattan Project—the Greenwich Village Project or the Newark Project. One problem is that it's hard to motivate scientists when they're not working on self-generated research problems that are intellectually interesting. The solution to this is that classic American movitator—*money*. Pay us enough and we'll do anything. Let us say we want to assemble a team of 1000 brain and computer scientists, preying upon the available university talent. We offer them salaries of $100,000 to $500,000. They would sign up in *seconds*. I mean, that's the kind of money *M.D.*'s make! As long as

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we preserve the "academic" lifestyle— you can wear whatever you want, you can stay up all night and sleep late, there's no real boss—Harvard will have to import Ph.Ds from Uganda to teach neurobiology! The cost of this would be $100 to $500 million a year. Figure an additional $100–$500 million for equipment and facilities, locating the project in some high-tech area like Silicon Valley, so everyone could go to San Francisco and spend their money. Also, we'll probably need an additional $100–$500 million or so per year to pay the salaries of administrators, secretaries, janitors and the like, and to pay for consumable supplies. Total cost is somewhere between $300 million and $1.2 billion, well within the expected box office receipts of the Spielberg-esque movie sequels.

How long would it take before Pauline Kael is swinging through the trees? Maybe three to five years. The project will build upon itself, with the final aspects of the mind-transfer process depending on the results collected in the initial stages. It may take six months to a year to do these experiments. Then, based on the results of the first experiments, additional experiments would have to be done. To save time, much of the work would be done as parallel, independent projects, but at some point, it would be necessary to combine the findings. What we're attempting to do is compress all the desultory scientific and technical developments that would happen as a matter of course over the next twenty to fifty years into one three to five year intensive session. If it does take as long as five years to perfect the mind-transfer process, then the cost will go as high as five billion dollars, about ten thousand times my own research budget, but still affordable for a Spielberg billionaire. And after Pauline Kael is playing on the veldt, there's John Simon, Andrew Sarris, and those guys on *Sneak Previews*. Maybe they'll all end up in the same baboon troop in the outback of Kenya. If, of course, they don't end up in *biomedical research*, ha! ha! ha! And then, Steverino could mind-transfer with Ingmar Bergman, and make "Indiana Jones and the Seventh Seal"! Indiana Jones

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finds some knight playing chess with Death. He uses his bullwhip on Death, and he and the knight go off and have an adventure! This could be followed by "Raiders of the Lost Cries and Whispers"! In this one, Liv Ullmann is tending bar in Nepal with her Swedish sisters. One of her sisters is always crying. Indiana Jones comes, grabs Liv Ullmann and goes off and has an adventure with her! The sister dies! Another ten-billion-dollar box-office gross!

Evil Geniuses

Even more important than money, however, is to be a genius. An evil genius could drastically shorten the time-table of any mad science development project. I am thinking of the guys in comic books that can make shrinking rays out of the innards of a MacIntosh. In science, a genius is someone who is essentially a clairvoyant. Einstein is one example. God knows how he thought of special and general relativity, but he was absolutely right. Nor is it so obvious that if he hadn't thought of it, someone else would have. Newton was another example. In one year, when he was twenty-four, he invented calculus, came up with his three laws of motion, worked out the law of universal gravitation, and discovered that white light is actually a mixture of different colors. When *I* was twenty-four, I think I discovered that chocolate syrup is surprisingly good on Haagen-Dazs Elberta Peach ice-cream. Such extremely intuitive scientists more or less have a tap into the mind of God, as opposed to the rest of us, who seem to be connected to a sewage-treatment plant in upstate New Jersey. Someone like Einstein or Newton single-handedly will advance science by almost a century. Imagine how quickly we could build a mind-transfer machine if a person with Einstein's abilities were interested in mad science.

How many such individuals are there? Well, physicists will often place Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell in the same class as Einstein or Newton. Newton was born in 1642, Faraday in 1791, Maxwell in 1831 and Einstein in 1879. The latter three were born roughly fifty years

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apart, while there's a 150 year gap between Newton and Faraday. Let us make the big assumption that these intervals reflect the frequency in which an intuitive genius is born. We will further postulate that an intuitive scientific genius results from having a uniquely complicated brain, determined largely by an individual's genes. The frequency at which such individuals occur depends on the size of the world's population, and the fraction of the world's population that could legitimately expect to become scientists. In Newton's time, that population consisted almost exclusively of upper-class European males, total number, maybe, ten million. Therefore, there is one intuitive scientific genius per ten million people. The larger population of the nineteenth century, and the ability of the middle-class to become scientists would explain why the births of Faraday, Maxwell and Einstein were more closely spaced.

Therefore, if the population of the technologically developed world is roughly 500 million people, then, approximately, there are 50 intuitive geniuses out there. What's your estimate of the percentage of humans that are in some way corrupt? Being an optimist, I'd say it's as low as 50 percent. That means that there are twenty-five potential evil geniuses in the world. Makes you kind of nervous, doesn't it? Maybe, at this very moment, they're about to orbit their Dreaded Twinkoon ray, to convert us all into small, yellow cream-filled baboons. More likely, they're breaking into some highly-protected computer system, wasting their awesome potential for evil to steal the latest video games. With one or two of these guys on our side, plus that ten billion dollar check from Steven Spielberg, every film critic in New York will soon be a new form of junk food. *Twinkoons*, anyone?

Professional Standards

Like any other high-powered profession, Mad Science needs some sort of accreditation and certification procedure. I mean, we can't have any old osteopath who can buy a secret underground lab, and take out an

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ad in the Yellow Pages, call himself or herself a Mad Scientist, can we? At the minimum, a Mad Scientist should be able to: a) Make a shrinking potion from the contents of the average junior college chemistry laboratory, or Deluxe Gilbert or Lionel-Porter Chemistry set, b) Build a matter-transmitter device or a fourth-dimensional ray from the materials obtained from an Apple MacIntosh or other popular personal computer, c) Mutate a common household pet and/or an undergraduate into a Giant Turtle Monster and attack Tokyo, d) From selected items in the Edmund Scientific catalog, construct a mind-transfer machine, and place minds of effete, serious-minded New York film critics into bodies of non-effete, full o' fun baboons, e) Again, from selected items in the Edmund Scientific catalog, build Twinkie ray, shine on entire campus population of Harvard University, f) Make 2×10^6 glasses of chocolate milk, and g) Invite entire city of Boston for a TV snack.

Also, you have to master the *cackle*. A proper, well-articulated cackle is essential to the mad scientist. It's hah!-hah!-hah!-*hah!*-*hah!*-hah!-hah!, and not *hah!*-hah!-hah!-hah!-hah!-hah!-*hah!*or heh!-hah!-hah!-hah!-*heh!*. Also, it's usually followed by "You fool! Your intellect is but that of a snail darter compared to mine!" Or, "You fool! Soon all of Harvard will be mine to consume. I'll eat Steven Jay Gould while watching the McNeil-Lehrer Report! *Cackle! Burp!*"

Another important point is *never experiment on yourself*. That is what undergraduates are for. Test that matter-transmitter device on yourself and you'll be known as "Flyface" to your colleagues. The more you think that neat, new potion is going to make you immortal, the more likely it is that you're going to become a Giant Turtle Monster. Sometimes, it's really hard to anticipate all of the subtle side-effects. Unless you want the National Guard firing Stinger missiles at your scaly back as you lay your eggs in lower Manhattan, stick to giving Jimmie-Bob and Carol-Sue extra-credit for doing volunteer work in your lab.

Finally, you must keep a detailed list of all the people

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you're going to *get*. I've taken to using one of those microcomputer data-base managers. It's really the only practical application I've found for the thing. For example, a certain science-fiction editor has now rejected *three* of my science-fiction stories. *Twinkie*, anyone? There is also the review panel that recently turned down my grant. *Baboon-burgers*, anyone? Add to this: the Margin Lady, the Associate Chief Librarian at my medical school (*Overdue! Shriek! Overdue!*), numerous teen-agers who tried to re-arrange my face, liver, pancreas and sigmoid colon, lotsa dumb girls who wouldn't go out with me (*pink* Twinkies!), George Lucas (he's trying to compete with me), everyone who's implied that my science is less than Nobel-Prize winning quality—*I'll get them all!!* You, too! Go ahead, tell me what you *really* think about this article. Say it. Nothing's going to happen to you. It's not as if my encephalographic cerebral-cortex scanner is *working*, after all. It's not as if it's hooked up to the Very-Large-Array Radio Telescope in New Mexico, and is capable of picking up a *gopher's* thoughts from 50,000 km away, much less *yours*. So, go ahead, tell me. But first, if you have a dog or some other household pet, you may want to lock it in a room somewhere. Dogs love *Twinkies*, after all. hah!-hah!-hah!-*hah!-hah!*-hah!-hah! ●

References

For more about Einstein, read the book of the same name by Jeremy Bernstein, Viking Press, 1973. Biographies of Newton, Faraday, and Maxwell can be found in *Lives in Sciences*, a collection of *Scientific American* articles, published by Simon and Schuster. Good books on what it's really like to be a modern scientist are *The Double Helix*, by James Watson, Signet and *The Nobel Duel*, by Nicholas Wade, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1981. Mostly, you talk on the phone a lot, and write a bunch of grants.

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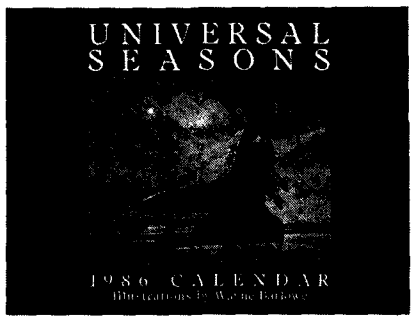
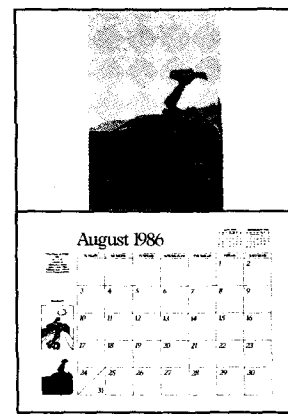
Announcing a Calendar for 1986 That Is in Horribly Good Taste





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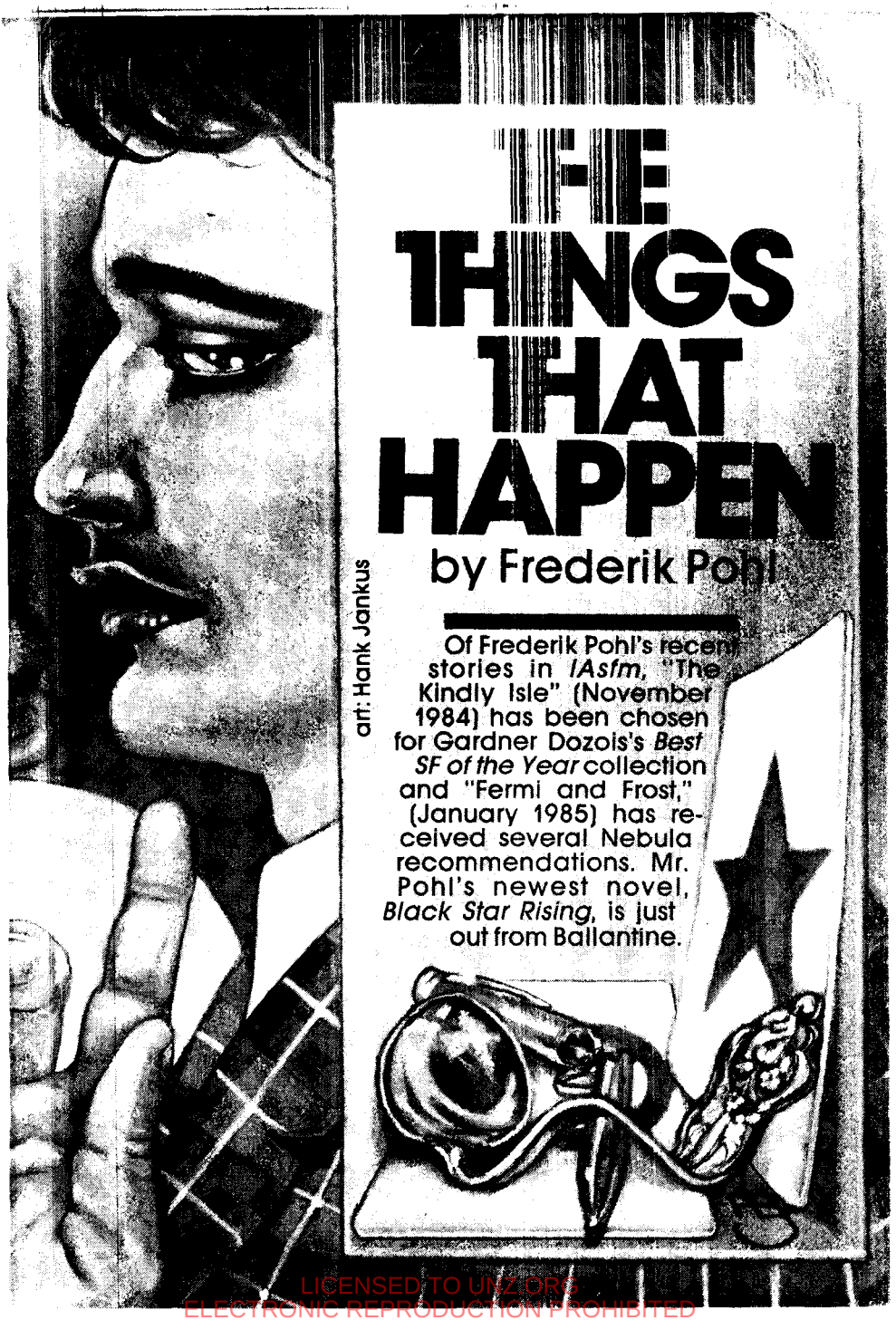

THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN

by Frederik Pohl

art: Hank Jankus

Of Frederik Pohl's recent stories in *IAsfm*, "The Kindly Isle" (November 1984) has been chosen for Gardner Dozois's *Best SF of the Year* collection and "Fermi and Frost," (January 1985) has received several Nebula recommendations. Mr. Pohl's newest novel, *Black Star Rising*, is just out from Ballantine.

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When I do a college date all I promise is to give a forty-minute talk with half an hour additional for "discussion." That's in the contract. There isn't a word about bending any spoons, or reading minds, or saying what somebody has in his pocket. I never say I'll do anything at all, outside of talk for a while. Sometimes I don't. I've got my memorized BAPS, or Basic All-Purpose Speech, which tells them how I don't understand my gifts, and how sometimes they work and sometimes they don't, and how maybe (I make a joke out of it) there's some truth to what somebody told me, that superior beings from the planet Clarion keep interfering with my gifts. Then I tell them a bunch of funny little stories about Johnny Carson and Merv Griffin and various celebrities I've appeared with . . . and then, after I've said thank-you-very-much to let them know it's time to applaud, when some of them start yelling out, "Stop my watch for me, Hans!" I'll just shake my head. "Not tonight, please," I say. "I just don't feel a thing, please." And I let them hiss.

Fritzl didn't like that. He said if they hissed too often there wouldn't be any more college dates, but then I got really tired of what Fritzl said. Besides, there hadn't been that many college lecture dates lately anyway.

In fact, the whole paranormal powers business had been really slow for me lately, which was why I let Fritzl talk me into this enterprise. I didn't want to. But he kept on saying, "Fifty. Thousand. Dollars." the way he did, and I couldn't hold out.

We did it carefully. First he staked the office out for a couple of days, and then I turned up cold one early afternoon. The guy and the woman were out to lunch, and the bookkeeper was filling in for the usual receptionist while she had her lunch. Perfect timing. I walked in the door, big grin, a little apologetic. "I'd like to see Dr. Smith or Miss Baker, please. My name is Hans Geissen. Oh, they're not? Well, I'll just wait, if you don't mind." And I didn't give the woman much of a chance to mind, because I was off rubbernecking around the walls before she answered. I was careful not to give her any reason to worry about me. There was a railing that divided Them from Us, and I stayed on the unprivileged side. But I didn't sit down. I walked around the waiting room, looking at the scrolls and the certificates and the portraits. There was a Doctor of Divinity sheepskin made out to the Reverend Samuel Shipperton Smith, from some denominational college in Hobart, Tasmania. There was a portrait of a skinny woman in Grecian robes, with a Grecian hairdo and holding a Grecian kind of lyre or harp or whatever they are. The Honorable Miss Gwendoline Stella Baker was the name on the gold plate on the frame.

There's always plenty of interesting stuff in a waiting room, if you know how to look for it. What you don't want is for anyone to see you looking at it, so as I passed the coffee table by the orange plastic-covered

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couch I picked up a copy of *People* and paged it slowly as I wandered. I didn't overdo it. When I though I'd done enough I sat down with the magazine in my lap and read it assiduously, looking up not at all, until the changing of the guard. When the real receptionist came back from her Burger King hold-the-lettuce Whopper and the two of them whispered over me I didn't raise my head. The bookkeeper scuttled away. The receptionist took her seat and immediately began a whispery phone conversation. Time passed. I let it pass. When, half an hour later, she disappeared into a private office in response to a faint murmur, I was when she came out just where she had left me when she went in. "Mr. Geissen?" she said.

I looked up, blinking a couple of times as though trying to remember what I was doing there.

"Dr. Smith and Miss Baker will see you in just a few minutes in the conference room."

"Oh, thank you," I said. "I'll be ready." But the fact was that I already was.

"You got by the people at S.R.I.," Fritzl said, "you got by the people at M.I.T., you got by Carson and 'Good Morning America' and the 'Today' show. You can handle these two people."

"Naturally I can handle them," I said. "It isn't a question of *handling* them. It's a question of what you can go to jail for."

"You just don't make any claims, stupid," he said. The way he talked to me!

"Of course I don't make any claims." I never did. I always said these things weren't under my control. I didn't promise a thing. I stayed on the move, sure, and if I got a chance to get away with it I'd turn your watch back or unzip your fly, and when your ballpoint pen breaks I'm just as surprised as you are. But if I don't get any chances, well, then I just give you the shamefaced grin that says some days are like that. "Get me a drink," I said, and got up and went over to the window. We were staying in the Plaza. A suite. Not a very big suite, but do you know how much even the little ones cost? But you can't be at the Y.M.C.A. when you want to do the 'Today' show.

He brought me my Campari and black cherry soda, and along with it a bracelet. I always wear a lot of jewelry; this one was intertwined snakes, and it fit right in, but I hadn't asked for it. "What now?" I asked.

He said, "Try to bend it." I couldn't. "Stainless steel, silver-plated," he said. "You want to bend a ten-penny spike, just stick it in there and push hard. It'll bend."

"Maybe," I said. I don't like to bend anything stronger than spoons, because it's hard to do it without grunting and straining.

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"No maybe. And it's magnetic, for in case you want to do a compass . . ." Hell, I had six different ways of doing the compass effect already, all of them good. The best is this little plastic marble with a magnet inside that I hold in my mouth. You've seen me do the compass on television? I just lean over it, concentrating, and the needle spins all around the card? Mostly I use the marble, and if I think some wise guy is going to look in my mouth afterward all I have to do is swallow it. Only they cost thirty bucks each, and it's kind of undignified to have to look for them afterward. ". . . when you go to see this guy Smith and his *schatzi,*" he explained, but I'd already figured out what he was up to.

"I didn't say I'd do that," I said.

"No, stupid, you didn't say that," he mimicked me, "but you don't got no choice, believe me."

"We're not doing so bad," I said.

"We are doing *schrecklich,*" he said. "Go see these two *shtunkers.* Let them tell you what a great psychic you are. Let them give you that fifty thousand dollar prize, then come back here and we split it up and head for some other country. Australia, maybe. We ain't ever done Australia."

"And what if I don't like Australia?"

"*Machts nicht,* kiddo. This place we used up. Only when you see them don't screw it up, okay?"

I said huffily, "I never screw it up! I've been doing this a long time, Fritzl." And he looked at me with those big, brown, hostile Kraut eyes.

"That's what bothers me, stupid. You're getting sloppy."

But I wasn't sloppy with the Reverend, or with the Honorable Miss either. She wasn't wearing her Grecian robes. She was wearing a three-piece gray wool pants suit that looked like she'd bought it by mail-order and forgotten her size. I told them my name, bashful and polite, and the Honorable Miss sniffed and said, "Oh, yes, Geissen. You're the show-business one. We've heard of you. I suppose you've come about the prize."

I have to say Fritzl had had a good idea about that. I was not surprised to hear that they'd heard of me—hell, crazies watch television, too—and I was ready with surprise and indignation. "Prize? I'm not looking for anything from you. I came because—" I pulled the clipping out of my pocket—"somebody sent me this classified ad." FREE TEST was the headline, and then it went on to say that anyone who thought he might have ESP or clairvoyance or any other paranormal experience could come to this office to be tested.

"And you want to be tested?" asked the Reverend Doctor. His voice was hostile. So was his body stance; he was sitting, tightly clutching his belly, erect on the far side of the conference table.

I shrugged. "I don't know if I'm a fake or not," I said.

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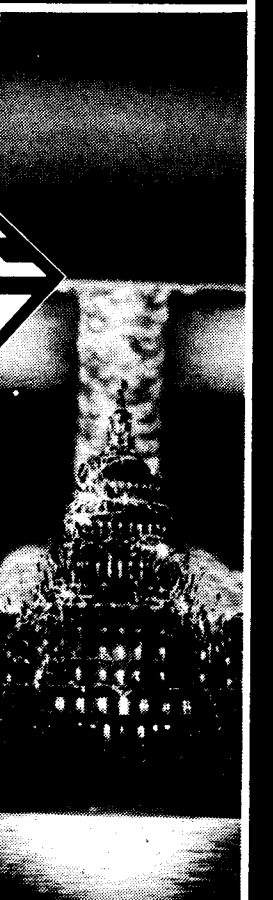

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Looks passed between them. I waited. "Get the file," said Smith, and the Honorable Miss rose to pluck a folder out of a cabinet. She pawed through it, extracted a sheet and handed it to him. He looked it over, nodded and passed it to me.

I had seen it before. It was a report that I knew well.

From *Preliminary Notes on H.G.*, by Gerard T. K. Shapman, *Journ. Amer. Parapsych.*, Vol. VIII No. 3 Pg. 262:

I first encountered the subject H.G. as an undergraduate in August, 1970. A number of incidents suggested latent noumetic talents but, in the absence of rigorous controls and a statistical base for analyses, I was unable to make a satisfactory assessment. However, three incidents from that era are worthy of recording.

1. H.G.'s early ability to manipulate objects at a distance ("telekinesis"[1]) was displayed in a laboratory experiment in which I was present at all times. Nevertheless, six connections in a transformer system were displaced.[2] I had set up and tested the connections myself. The room was locked and empty until H.G. entered it in my company. He was under my constant observation until I discovered the displaced connections. There was only one door, which was secured by a deadfall bolt lock. The windows were barred. There was no possibility, or evidence, of any intrusion.[3] Significantly, the telekinetic effects were exerted in a manner which seriously and adversely affected H.G.'s laboratory credits, causing him to fail the course. (Similar observations have been made by others. Cf., Renfrew,[4] Bayreuth,[5] and others.)

2. In the second instance, H. G. was able to describe the contents of a closed box[6] to which he had no possibility of previous access. There were no visual, auditory, olfactory or tactile clues. Although his description was not exact in detail it was inarguably correct in principle.

3. In the third instance, from a distance of more than 3,000 miles (4800 km.) he referred to my new wife by her personal nickname in a letter mailed to me from Germany after our marriage. He had never met her. The letter was in response to a notice in the alumni magazine, *Tech Times*,[7] which gave only her actual name, not in the least like the "pet name," by which I called her, which he had never heard.

All of these, and other, incidents were suggestive but, of course, by no means conclusive. However, when in the following year H.G. was discharged from the United States Army and returned to the Cambridge area I asked him to participate in a series of rigorous tests which established conclusively that he possessed paranormal powers to a previously unknown degree.

"Ah, yes. The M.I.T. tests," I said. "I was working as French Fry Man

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in the McDonald's at Harvard Square when Dr. Shapman came in for a Big Mac and vanilla shake."

"Tests have been faked," said suspicious old Sam Smith, looking skinny and mean.

I threw myself abjectly on the ground and licked his shoes—I don't mean literally. "I know that," I said. "I don't blame you if you don't believe them."

"What about believing you, Geissen?" asked the old lady. "Do you think you're a trustworthy witness?"

"Not at all," I said, and squeezed out a tear—I do mean literally. I've always been able to cry whenever I wanted to. "I don't even know what happens, Miss Baker. No. I shouldn't have come here. I'll go—"

Smith let me get as far as standing up, crossing the room, putting my hand on the doorknob. Then he said, voice like a rusty oven door, "We don't go by belief, Geissen. We go by evidence."

"And it's true," said Miss Baker judgmatically, "that this Dr. Shapman was not as big a fool as most."

But about that I couldn't agree with her.

I'd known Shapman a long time, since I was a sophomore at M.I.T., the year before I dropped out. He was my physics prof. He was also into psychic phenomena, though he didn't bring it into his classes, and some of the other guys tried to ass-kiss him by bragging about the dreams they'd had that foretold when their fathers would run off the road coming home from a party, stuff like that. I didn't bother. I listened to the gossip, mostly about how he was being given a hard time by those other faculty types Minsky and Lettvin and so on. Shapman got cut up by them, but he had tenure. And nobody could say he was crooked. He and his mother were in it together, I guess she turned him on to it. They'd been members of the Society for Psychical Research, fooled around with Rhine cards, all that stuff. Never got far until they got me, and then you never saw such happy people.

They didn't show it to me much. Old lady Baker was right, Shapman wasn't as big a fool as most, and when he got down to rigorous testing, after I got back from my eighteen months in the Army and he found me in the McDonald's, he was suspicious as hell. He had me doing my stuff inside a Faraday cage, a room completely enclosed in a dielectric, and he was always going over the copper screen with capacitance detectors, looking for leaks. He never found any. Who needed leaks by then? By then I had had eighteen months with Fritzl.

He did, though, start me in the business, when I was still his student.

I was squeezing out a "D," right on the narrow edge of flunking the course and being kicked out of the whole school. What was wrong with

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that was that the draft was still going, and there was the Army hot for my bod the minute the Institute bounced me. So I was hungry to pass.

So, this day in October, Shapman told me I was getting an "F" for a lab demonstration and I squeezed out my tear and he gave me permission to redo the experiment. I forget exactly what it was, but I was supposed to do something with a laser and I couldn't make it lase. I got there early, checked over the equipment, screwed it up. I began to pump, but I wasn't watching the voltages. We blew a fuse. I replaced the fuse, and then the whole damned thing wouldn't work.

Hell with it. I turned everything off, locked the door and went out into the yard to smoke a joint. The late warm Massachusetts October sunlight was precious. The dope was good. I sat there, reading a book on spiders. I don't get all choked up about spiders, but one of the guys was telling me how spiders make love, and it sounded dirty enough to tell girls in bars, so I was looking it up. And I forgot the time. And when I thought of going back in the hall Shapman was there already, unlocking the door, balancing a four-inch cardboard box with holes in it. "Ah," he said, watching me bounce trippily toward him, "I see you're in a good mood, Mr. Geissen."

"Sorry I'm late, sir." I squinted at the box. "What've you got there, sir, a black widow?"

"What?" He stopped with the door half open, staring suspiciously.

"I said I thought maybe you had a black widow spider in there, sir," I said, courteous, alert, reverent.

He didn't say anything for a moment. Then he said, "Come on in, Geissen." He held the door for me to pass, then came in after me and set the box down. He was in a brown study. "How did you know that?" he asked.

"Know what, sir?" He glared at me. "You mean it really is a black widow spider?"

"No, it isn't. It's a banded argiope, but it's a spider all right."

I didn't push it. "I don't know, Professor Shapman," I said, all open and honest. "It just, I don't know, it *felt* all crawly and leggy, like. Maybe it was seeing the holes in the box."

"Yeah." Still frowning to himself, he turned on the lights and sat down next to his spider. I could see that it had a little tag attached to it, you know, the kind you put on presents. "Get on with the experiment," he said. "I have to meet somebody."

"Yes, sir." I wasn't about to tell him that I'd screwed the equipment up. I was feeling nice and warm and comfortable from the good dope, and I went through the motions with him frowning at me every second.

"You're not getting enough voltage," he said sharply.

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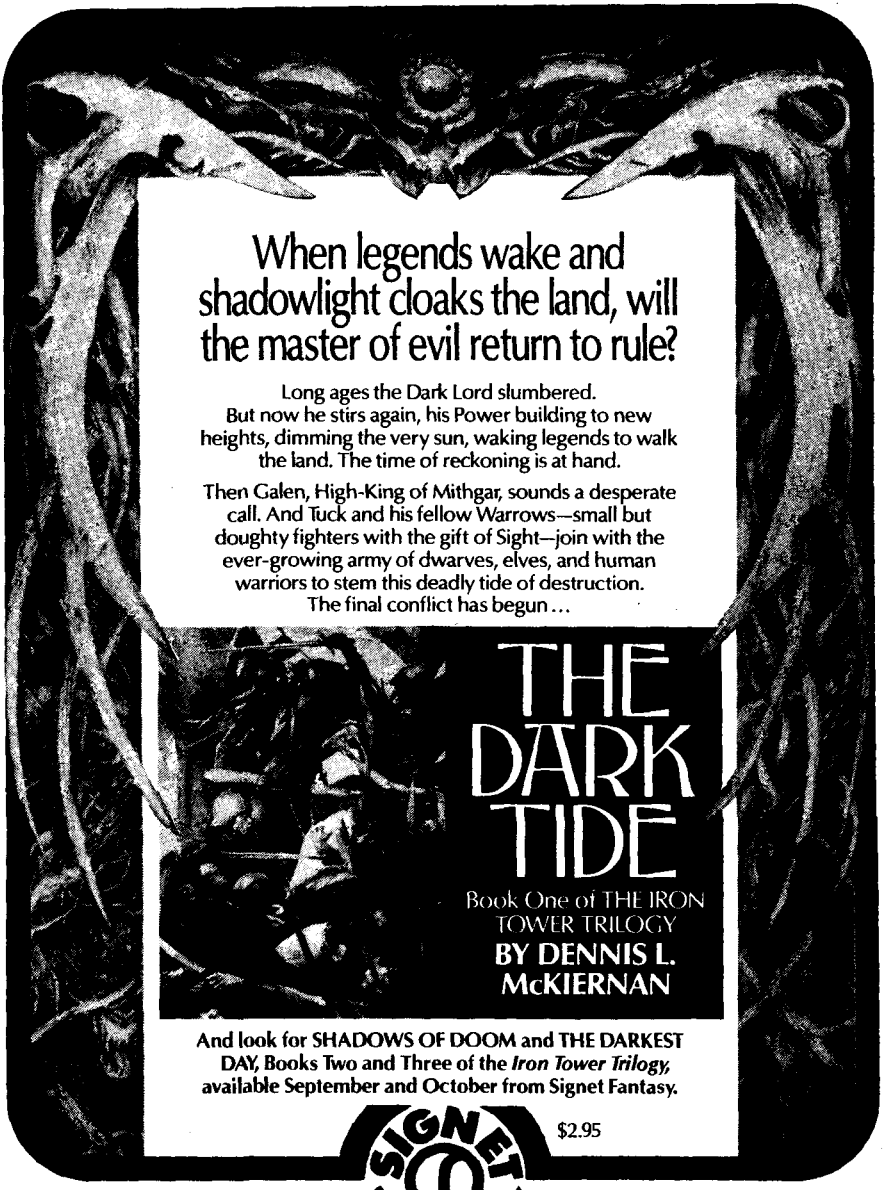

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"I know that, Professor Shapman,"—*lawdy, massah, I'se doin' the best-est I kin*—"there seems to be something wrong."

"Impossible," he said sharply, put down the spider, came over to the rig. After a minute of fooling around he went over to the bench with the transformer. "That's very funny," he complained.

"What's that, Professor Shapman?" I dripped humility.

"The wiring is wrong." He looked up at me, sharp suspicion. "Did you fool around with this part?"

"Me, Professor Shapman?" Injured innocence this time; and he shook his head.

"No, you couldn't have, could you? You weren't even in this part of the room." Suspicion was fading, but he was still staring at me. And me, I was feeling pretty mellow.

"That's the way it goes sometimes, Professor," I said, meaning nothing in particular by it.

Unfortunately, he asked me, "What do you mean by that?"

He was chilling my nice warm marijuana glow, and I didn't want him to. I improvised. "Oh, well," I said, "I mean . . . well, it's hard to put into words, but things happen."

"Things *happen*?"

"Different kinds of things. Like fuses blow. Clocks stop. Wires come loose from distributor caps. Things like that, Professor, I don't know why they happen but they do." I was just winging it. The dope was talking, more than me.

It made him look thoughtful, but that's as far as it went. He fiddled with the power source and I fiddled with the argon tube and we finally got a good stream of coherent light. But we didn't talk much after that, and the son of a bitch failed me for the course anyway.

So the Army got my bod, I wound up in Wiesbaden, and in the Amerika Haus there I met Fritzl. He was stealing books out of the library to improve his English. Dumb-looking little Kraut, he looked about fourteen, was actually two years older than I was—in some ways, oh, *much* older. He was going to be a famous conjuror. We used to meet in the back of the magic shop where he worked in Frankfurt and he told me how he would go on the stage in America and make his fortune.

Then he got the better idea.

Have I mentioned that the Honorable Miss Gwendoline Stella Baker looked a lot like a snake? Not one of your friendly little garter snakes, I mean, not even a rattler. What she looked like was a cobra, with her hair spread out like the cobra's hood and her long neck wavering as though getting ready to strike. She struck. "I am surprised, Mr. Geissen,"

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she hissed, "that a man who is as much of a television star as you hasn't been here before."

"To see if you can fool us out of the fifty thousand dollars," The Reverend Doctor Samuel Shipperton Smith chimed in.

I nodded to show that I was trying to see their point of view. "I don't blame you for being suspicious," I said. "I would be too. I guess you get a lot of phonies coming in here for that money."

"You must think we're very stupid, Geissen," she went on, still sounding snaky. It was a hiss, all right, but it was more than that, it was a kind of false-teeth whistle. Looking at her closely her teeth did look funny. Probably china choppers; probably the bustline was falsies; she didn't seem to fit the figure she displayed. And Smith himself was obviously wearing a toupee and, I was pretty sure, some kind of suntan makeup on his face. He added his two cents' worth:

"You probably think everybody is stupid. Do you expect anyone to believe that there are people on the planet Clarion who make your tricks fail most of the time?"

"I don't do tricks, Mr. Smith," I said politely. "Do you want me to go away?"

Pause while they looked at each other. Then, "We didn't tell you to come," said Smith. "Go if you want to."

He didn't sound as if he really meant it, so all I did was open the door to the outside office. I stood there for a minute, while the receptionist looked up to see what I was doing. I took a quick look at my wristwatch, then turned back to the freaks. I looked as though I were making up my mind to say something to them. I didn't think I would really have to, because the secretary had seen me look at my watch, and naturally that made her look at the clock, and her gasp came later than I expected it but it came. "Reverend Smith!" she called. "The clock's stopped."

I looked embarrassed.

Smith looked sarcastic. That skinny face didn't look handsome the best day of its life, and when it was looking sarcastic it looked particularly weasely. "Used your time in the waiting room profitably, did you?" he asked me.

"My time?" I blinked. "In the waiting room? Oh, you mean I could have done something to the clock?" I allowed myself to look hangdog. "If you think that, Mr. Smith, I guess I should stop wasting your time."

"No, do stay," said the Honorable Miss Baker, looking as poisonous as he but in her own snaky, rather than weasely, way. "What other little surprises did you set up for us?"

"Things just happen," I said miserably. "I'm sorry! I always tell them I'm sorry!"

"And do you tell them you're a fake, Geissen?" she demanded.

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"That, too! Yes! I tell them I think it is all a fake, this wholething—only I don't know who is faking it!"

Because, you see, that's really what I did tell them, because that's what Fritzl told me to do. It always worked. The more you say you don't do anything, the more they prove to you that you do. And of course, after all those hours of practicing with Fritzl in the back room of the magic shop in Frankfurt, there was plenty I *could* do.

Only at first I only did it for fun. Like when Professor Shapman showed up at the McDonald's. He was just in for a Big Mac and a shake, but when he saw me there he turned purple."Geissen! When did you get out of the Army? Listen, I want to talk to you."

The manager was giving me looks. "I'm busy, Professor," I said, which was true.

"A minute of your time," he begged. "You, are you the manager? This man is a former student and it's important that I talk to him, all right?" And then, when we were in a booth at the back of the store, he said, "I've been thinking about you. Would you be interested in, ah, performing a series of tests?"

"What kind of tests?" I asked, watching him spill shredded lettuce and secret-formula sauce on his shirt front. I took a napkin and reached across the table to wipe up the worst of it.

"Paranormal studies, Hans. Just a few hours of that sort of thing, the cards, the sealed envelopes, you know."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I declared. "What kind of money are we talking?"

He looked baffled, mouth ajar to spill some more of his Big Mac. "Money?"

"I get my two-thirty-five an hour here, Professor Shapman. I need it to live on."

"If it's a question of money—"

"That's what it's a question of."

"—maybe something could be worked out," he finished, beginning to chew again. "Why don't you think about it? Give me a call?"

I sighed and wiped up another dollop of sauce from his tie. "I'll think," I said, "but honestly, Professor Shapman, I don't know how many favors I want to do you. You flunked me out, you know. And I've got to get back to work."

And I did, without looking back at him, but out of the corner of my eye I saw him watching me as he finished his sandwich. I kept busy. When he got up to leave he paused to dump his tray in the trash container and then headed back toward me. I thought he was going to tell me that he'd noticed his slide-rule tie clip was bent double, but he hadn't noticed

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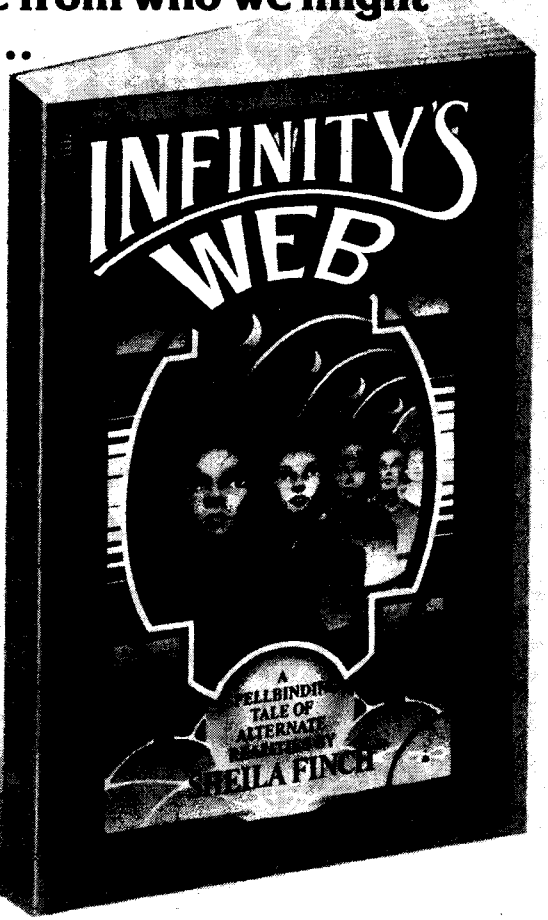
Each life is the result of an infinity of choices—choices that separate who we are from who we might have been...



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that. All he wanted was to say, "By the way, the Spider Lady sends her regards."

So that night I told Fritzl about it and he gave me hell. "Stupid! You got a pigeon and you let him get away! What's this 'Spider Lady' dreck?"

I shrugged. "I saw in *Tech Times* that he got married so I sent him a get-well card. I wrote on it 'Best wishes to you and the Spider Lady.' He'd got this spider for her, see—and I'd been drinking—"

"Drinking! Yah, I know about you and drinking back in Wiesbaden. You don't start that again!"

I said reasonably, "You don't give me orders, Fritzl. I don't mind sharing a room with you till you get your career started, but—"

"Career! You don't know what's career!" he yelled, getting excited. "Now you listen and I tell you what to do. You call up this Herr Professor and tell him you changed your mind. Then we start career."

I was getting sore. He was always a pretty bossy guy, Fritzl, but the deal we'd made in Germany was that I'd be his manager if I helped him get to America. Nobody said anything about his being mine. There was a bar in Lexington that said they might take him on for a try-out if we got somebody with a guitar to back him up, so I began, "What about—"

"What about everything," he said grimly, "is that in one hour you are going to call this Herr Professor and tell him you come over. Then I tell you what to do. But first you spend the next hour practicing with the cards!"

The good part of it was that the Spider Lady was a nice-looking woman. Her real name was Lillian, and she had that good woman smell that's part perfume and part sex, and when she let me in and sat me down to wait for her husband she didn't mind touching a little bit while she took my coat. There were possibilities there. "We're just going to eat, Hans," she said, "and you look like you could use a home-cooked meal."

So I let myself be persuaded. A good cook she was not; steak and salad and baked potato, but the steak was gray all the way through and the potato still hard; but while we were eating our knees touched a couple times under the table. Then she cleared away and old Shapman brought out the Rhine cards.

You know what they are. There are twenty-five cards in the pack, five each of five different symbols. There's a cross, a star, wavy lines, all that stuff. I took a brandy from him. It was cheap New York State brand-X, not what I'm used to these days, but at the time it tasted pretty good to me, and I let Shapman run through the cards three times. The first time I got seven right. The second four. The third time six. "Hum," he said, disappointed. "Well, it's a *little* over chance, but—"

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"I didn't feel anything," I said apologetically.

He looked thoughtful. "What do you mean, feel anything?"

I shrugged. "Sometimes I feel like I can do it, sometimes I don't. It doesn't mean anything, I guess, I mean, I don't think I really have any of this crazy psi stuff—"

He looked indignant, and the Spider Lady grinned. "I wonder if what you need is another brandy, Hans?" she offered, and while she was getting up to get it Shapman said:

"I want to show you something." And so he went out of the room to get something and she was over at the sideboard, and there was I with the deck of cards right in front of me. By the time she turned back with my drink I was standing up, looking out the window. She handed me the glass and reached past me, to a sort of desk at the window, to pick up a deck of ordinary playing cards.

"Hey, we going to do some tests with them?" I asked.

She laughed. "I'm just tidying up, Hans. I play a lot of solitaire, with Jerry away so much—he's running the M.I.T. chapter of the Psychic Research Society, you know." I didn't know. "He's pretty hopeful about you," she went on. "According to him, you do all kinds of things."

"All kinds," I agreed, looking at her. Nice legs, if a little plump, and she was wearing a really short skirt to make sure they were noticed. She was a lot closer to my age than to Shapman's. "I mean," I said, "I don't know about this ESP stuff."

"Really?"

"It's just that funny things happen. I guess the professor told you about that laser test rig that got scr—that got messed up. And then—" I chuckled—"well, there was a funny one in Germany. I had some, you know, dope in my locker, and they pulled a surprise inspection. I was scared out of my head. I wished the grass would go away. Then, just as the captain was coming to me, I heard this noise, and there was the pouch and the hash pipe rolling on the floor."

Shapman had come up behind me. "Teleportation?" he asked eagerly.

"I don't know what you call it. It wasn't what I was wishing. I was wishing the damn stuff was in China! The captain couldn't miss it, it was right in front of him. But it worked out all right. He couldn't prove it was mine, so I just got restricted to base instead of a D.D."

Shapman sighed and changed the subject. He held his open palm out to me. "Do you know what this is?"

Of course I did. "It's one of those M.I.T. tie clips. How'd you break it?"

"I was going to ask you that," he barked.

I said apologetically, "I don't think I ever saw it before, Professor. If I stepped on it or something I'm really sorry."

He sighed. He turned the bent clip over in his hand a couple of times,

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then put it carefully in his pocket. "Why are the best talents so erratic?" he asked the world.

I said, "I don't think I'm much of a talent. Oh, yes, things happen. Things get broken—pencils, keys, wristwatches. Glasses. Sometimes I put my sun glasses down when I come home, and I don't know if they're going to be in one piece or not when I go to get them again."

He took his pipe out of his pocket. "Want to try to break this?" he challenged, and his wife squealed.

"Jerry! I paid thirty-four dollars for—"

"Don't worry, Mrs. Shapman," I laughed. "I wouldn't know how. Only—" I hesitated, then shrugged—"only, I have to admit, sometimes I *feel* as though I could do anything. Really confident."

He fumbled in his pocket for a notebook, began to jot things down in it. "How were you feeling when we were running the cards?"

"Not too confident, no."

"Want to try it again?" He started back to the table and I stopped him.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Sometimes—Look, just put your hand on the top card, okay?"

He looked suspicious, but he did. I thought for a while. "Maybe—Maybe if you just peeked at it, I mean don't let me see it or anything. . . ."

He started to do that, then paused and took his glasses off. No chance of me playing any tricks by seeing a reflection, no sir! He cupped the top card, staring at it, then glancing eagerly at me.

I disappointed him. I gave it a good long wait, then I shook my head. "Let me try touching," I said, and reached out and touched his other skinny hand. I made a face. "Square?" I said doubtfully. It was the wavy lines.

He said sadly, "It's the wavy lines."

"I just don't get anything from you," I apologized. "Maybe if Mrs. Shapman—"

"Absolutely. Come on, Lil! Here, just put your hand on top here—"

She wasn't reluctant at all. Smiling, she picked up the top card and gave me her hand to hold.

I said triumphantly: "Square!"

It was. She picked up the next one.

"Star! . . . Square again. . . . Wavy lines. . . ." And I went through about twenty cards, and then I stopped.

"I don't want to do any more," I said.

"What do you mean, you don't want to do any more?" Shapman demanded. "Go ahead, Geissen! There are only a few more in the deck—"

"I'm really sorry," I said, swallowing, "but that brandy—maybe I shouldn't have—"

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"Now, *please*, Geissen! You got seventeen out of twenty! Just finish the run!"

"Leave the boy alone," his wife ordered, looking at me sharply. "Are you all right, Hans?"

"Not really," I said faintly. "Could I have a glass of water? Or—" And I stood up, looking very unwell indeed, and the Spider Lady understood at once and pointed me toward the little toilet off the foyer. I vomited noisily and a lot. It was a terrible waste of a not very good dinner and some fair brandy, and all I had to do was to stick my finger a little bit down my throat. While I was rinsing the taste out of my mouth there was a knock on the door. Shapman. He didn't wait to be invited in. He pushed the door open and stood there.

"Sev. En. Teen," he said.

I spat the water out into the bowl and took another mouthful.

"Please, Hans," he begged. "Just one more run!"

I said faintly, "I really want to go home. Could you call me a cab?"

"I'll drive you. Or you could stay here, and we'll try again in the morning—Lily! Let's make up the spare—"

"No," I said definitely. "Home."

I could see that he was wavering between firm and cherishing. He came down on cherishing because, I knew, he wanted to keep me sweet for the next time; only I didn't think there was going to be a next time. Not with him. With Lily Shapman, though, that was something else, because all the time I was running the deck I'd felt her little hot finger wriggling against my little hot palm. And as we were getting into the car he paused, took out the notebook again and said, "I just want to write down the date and get your signature and—*Jesus*!"

Lillian Shapman, helping me into the rear seat, called irritably, "What is it now, Jerry?"

"Look at my pen!" It was a Bic ballpoint, snapped clean in half. "And I *swear* nobody touched it after I put it in my pocket!"

And when Fritzl asked how it went I told him it had gone fine indeed. "I got the pen when he helped me on with my coat," I said. "No sweat. And the cards were a breeze." Seventeen out of twenty! I could have done all twenty—standing on my head, drinking a glass of water, once he went out of the room and left me with them.

"That was good," said Fritzl, uttering an unwilling compliment. "Now you don't see him a while."

"How about his wife?" I asked, half joking, but Fritzl took me seriously.

"Why not? Then if he says later you're a fake you have got there a very good reason why he is jealous. No. Good all the way. Now we just wait till he writes it up."

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"Okay," I yawned, getting ready to go to bed. But before I sacked in I pulled the phone plug out. I didn't want Shapman calling me up when he got home and found that his pipe was broken too.

That's the secret, you see. Never promise to do anything in particular. But if you ask me to read a secret message inside an envelope I'll stop your watch or tell you your dead aunt-by-marriage's maiden name or, what the hell, tie a knot in your garters. I've got these really nice specialties, like one where I give you a box of Crayolas and let you touch the back of my neck and then I tell you what color it is. Only if you ask me to do that I probably won't deliver . . . but while I'm failing, watch your ballpoint pens.

The way it turned out I did go back to Shapman. I let him put me in the Faraday cage, and I made his compass spin, and I bollixed up his pocket calculator—and all the while, the evenings he was out at the Society, the cage I was in was the Spider Lady's, and I claim I bollixed her up to where she was spinning like a top, and at that one I never failed at all.

"Oh," grumbled the Reverend Doctor, "sit down, Geissen. Do you want the fifty thousand or not?"

Along about then my instincts began to taste something sour. If he was going to throw me out, he should have thrown me out. If he wasn't, he should have been a little friendlier. . . . But he wasn't unfriendly, exactly, when he pushed past me to talk to the receptionist. I sat down, snaky Miss Baker watching me silently and carefully, while Smith muttered at the girl outside and she whispered back. He came back in and closed the door.

"All the red pens have black caps now and all the black ones have red. A very stupid trick, Geissen. Also her electric pencil sharpener doesn't work."

Snaky hiss from the Honorable Miss. "You'd think he'd show some imagination," she said. I shrugged. They both watched me silently for a moment.

Then Smith said, "There are one or two things."

I looked up, trying not to look as though I cared one way or another. "I don't know what you mean, sir," I said politely.

Grunt. "We have tapes of some of your television appearances, Geissen." That wasn't news to me, of course. It was very unlikely they would have missed any, given what they were supposed to be looking for. "Do you remember the one with that talk-show man in Palo Alto?"

I made believe to have to search my memory, but actually I remembered it very well. It was one of my better gigs. It was thinking on my feet, and that was what I was a lot better than Fritzl at.

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"I think so," I said cautiously. "I think I got there late." Actually, that was just lying to stay in practice. I hadn't got there late, I got there in plenty of time, and I sat in the green room reading a magazine, where everybody could watch me so they'd know I wasn't doing anything tricky. I didn't bother with makeup. Why would a nice, clean, eager-to-please young fellow like me put something artificial on his face? I didn't move until they called me to go out front.

Then it didn't go well at all.

They sat me down, and I saw my host run off to the wings during the commercial; his girl friend handed him something, and I couldn't see what; then the commercial was over and he was standing in front of his desk. "All right, Hans," he beamed, "I've got something in my closed fist. Can you tell me what it is?"

The son of a bitch. I knew everything on his desk or in his pockets, of course. I didn't know what his girl might have handed him. I winged it. "I'm getting an image—I don't know—All I can see, it's kind of round?" No response on his face. What would the bitch have handed him, a kind of powder-puff maybe? "I get a feeling of softness—It's something kind of, I don't know—" I tried to look blushy. "Sort of personal, I think."

Polite smile. "Can you say what color it is?"

"Uh. . . . Not really. Kind of light?"

He grinned and opened his hand and it was, for Christ's sake, an *ice cube*. Jesus! Why hadn't I seen the water dripping? It had begun to melt a little, and so the corners were a little rounded off from melting. But that wasn't good enough.

I tried a save. "I guess Clarion must have moved into the constellation of Sagittarius," I said, grinning.

He all but laughed in my face. "The *what?*"

I was stalling, waiting for inspiration. "The planet Clarion. I don't know if it's real. Only somebody told me I'd never be able to do anything when they were in a bad sign."

"Sure," he said, openly winking at the audience. "You want to tell us about these flying-saucer people that mess you up?"

"They don't come in flying saucers, as far as I know. It's just a theory, you know? Like the square root of minus one."

"Oh, yeah," said wise-ass, nodding hard, "the square root of minus one."

"Exactly," I said eagerly, cudgeling my memory—what had Fritzl told me about the stuff in his desk drawer? Or his wallet? "It's imaginary, maybe, but it works. Like they're afraid of us, see, and if they find anybody who really does have psi powers they wreck it for him, so Earthlings won't ever be a threat. . . ." Diner's Club card, AmEx gold card,

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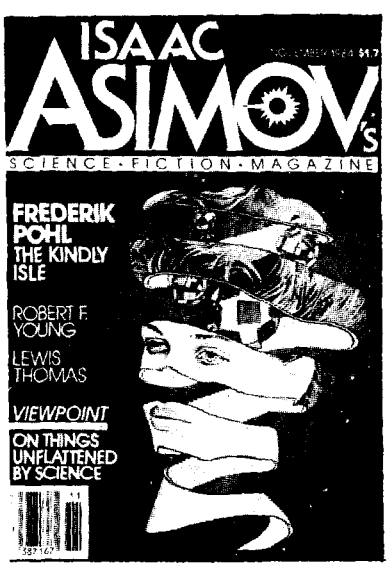

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two fifty-dollar bills, one of them folded into the driver's license—"Oh, I'm getting something!" I cried.

"The boot?" he grinned, and the audience chortled.

"No, no really! Soft, round, pale-colored—yes, that's it." I leaned over and whispered in his ear. "The Trojan in your wallet." He jumped back, staring at me. "Only," I said bashfully, "I wouldn't, you know, count on that one, because it has a hole in it." And I didn't have to say any more, because his face said it for me, and as the audience caught on I got about the biggest laugh—the biggest one on my side, anyway—of my career.

But I never got invited back on that show. . . .

"So how did you know he had a condom in his wallet?" asked Smith.

I shrugged. "Lots of guys carry them," I said.

"In this age of the pill?" he demanded.

"Like," I said, blushing, "if he's afraid somebody might have kind of a disease? *I* don't know, Mr. Smith."

"No," said Smith thoughtfully. He looked at the woman. She looked out of her lidless, shiny eyes at him. He made up his mind. "Come in my private office," he ordered abruptly, stood up, led the way, opened the door, turned on the light switch.

The light didn't light. Instead, his TV set burped and buzzed and turned itself on. It was daytime television, a rerun of "My Favorite Martian."

"You sit still," ordered Smith, and his eyes were furious. I expected a reaction. I didn't expect it to be that big. I sat. Miss Baker was poking around in his desk, and she squawked and grabbed him, muttering in his ear, holding up a sheet of paper. It had a caricature of her on it, and it had been locked inside the desk. He muttered back, and waved to the bookcase; she began investigating that while he methodically emptied everything in his desk.

I just sat, waiting. Feeling good. Admiring the office. It had everything, including a wet bar with a sink and a refrigerator and a little gas range and a Dispos-All and a Cuisinart. There was a handsome leather couch along one wall, about twenty-five hundred dollars better looking than the raggedy old thing in the reception room; the desk itself was teak, and the chair behind it was one of those electric things that fits any position. When he sat down in it and pushed a button absent-mindedly it lurched and nearly threw him across the room. He yelled out in anger. I didn't understand what he said, but Miss Baker did. She jumped to the window, pointing out at the fire escape. Smith jumped after her, then shook his head, snarling something, and pointed to the joints in the window. They had been painted shut long before. Nobody had needed to open that window, with the air-conditioner mounted right below it; and certainly nobody had come in through it lately. He turned away; then,

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with a sudden thought, turned back. He looked at the air-conditioner, then at me.

Then he shook his head. Certainly a big fellow like me could never have squeezed through that space, even if he had been able to get the air-conditioner out from outside. And indeed I couldn't.

But skinny little Fritzl could. By now he was back in the apartment, resting up. But he'd done the job.

I don't know what-all they found. Fritzl was an ingenious man, and he'd had more than half an hour while we were talking in the other office. I don't even know if they found everything. What I know is that after a while Smith stopped looking, and sat back on the desk, looking at me. He said something to Miss Baker that I couldn't understand.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Smith," I said politely. "What did you say?"

"I said we cannot, after all, take chances," he told me, and she nodded, the eyes fixed on me in a way I didn't like.

He went to the wall, where a picture of the Coliseum had been replaced with a full-length color photograph of me holding a bent spoon. He ripped the picture off and felt the wall behind it. There was nothing to see there, but he dug his fingernails into a crack in the paneling. A square of the wall came away. There was a safe behind it. I watched with admiration; not even Fritzl had found that! He opened it and took out something that looked, to my surprise, like a weapon.

It was.

It was not any kind of gun I had ever seen before, and it didn't make a gunshot noise. All it did was kind of poop out a quick purplish glow.

But that purplish glow was pretty powerful stuff, because all at once I was all limp. It was like novocaine suddenly hit every nerve and muscle. Nothing felt attached to me any more. I fell over. None of my limbs responded to anything I asked of them. My mouth wouldn't speak. Only my eyes stayed open.

For a moment Smith and Baker were almost as still as I. I could hear them whispering faintly to each other, but they watched me without moving. Then Smith pointed to the sink. Baker slithered over to it, turned on the water, touched the switch for the Dispos-All.

It didn't work.

She snapped something at Smith, who came over and looked into my eyes. "You affected that, too?" he asked. "Ah, a really powerful talent. Well, I will just get my tools and fix it."

Miss Baker didn't respond, or even look at him as he went out, closing the door after him. She was busy with something else. From a cabinet under the sink she took out a plastic sheet and spread it on the floor. From another, a selection of knives, cleavers, a butchers' bone saw. She arranged them carefully on the plastic, working fast. Her hair fell in her

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eyes; she pulled the wig off and her bald skull looked more snakelike than ever.

And she didn't speak, and I couldn't.

I couldn't to her, and I couldn't to Smith when he came back and patiently, methodically began disassembling the Dispos-All. Nor did he speak to me. Not while he was getting comfortable by removing his own wig, and the false nose that covered the ugly pit in the middle of his face he breathed through; not while he was putting the disposer back together; not even while he was helping Miss Smith into the white coverall that would keep her other clothes from unwanted stains. Only then did he come over to look down at me.

"One thing you might like to know," he said. "The name of the planet isn't Clarion." And then he leaned down to take my shoulders, while skinny Miss Baker easily lifted my legs and they carried me over to the plastic sheeting with the knives, the saw, and the cleaver. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 22)

SOLUTIONS TO PUZZLES IN FLATLAND

The 15 moves are CEFDBACEGFDBCED.

Generalizations and variations of this classic puzzle lead into fascinating regions of algebra and combinatorics, where lovely symmetries are encountered. Here are some paths to explore:

1. Assume the puzzle has n black counters at one end, n white counters at the other, with one empty space separating them. Prove that the minimum-move solution has $n\ (n\ +\ 2)$ moves.

2. Below each letter of the solution above put S if the move is a slide, J if it is a jump. You get the string SJSJJSJJJSJJSJS. Note that the sequence is a palindrome. Prove that all minimum-move solutions for a board of length $n\ +\ 1$ have a palindromic sequence of slides and jumps.

3. Below each letter of the above solution put B for black and W for white. You get the string BWWBBBWWWBBBWWB, another palindrome. Show that all minimum-move strings are palindromes.

4. Figure 2 is a graph showing the movement of the blank cell in the minimum-move solution for $n\ =\ 3$. Observe that it has 180-degree rotational symmetry (looks the same upside down). Prove this true of all miminum-move solutions.

5. Analyze the puzzle when there are more empty cells than one between the two sets of counters.

6. Suppose the counters in the two sets are *not* equal: m black counters

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and n white with one vacant cell between them. Show that the minimum-move solution is $mn + m + n$, of which mn are jumps and $m + n$ are slides. Our original problem is, of course, a special case of this more general problem. Let $m = n$ and you get the formula $n(n + 2)$.

If we redefine the word "move," there is a joke solution to the original problem that lowers the number of moves from 15 to 1. If you can't think of it, see page 181.

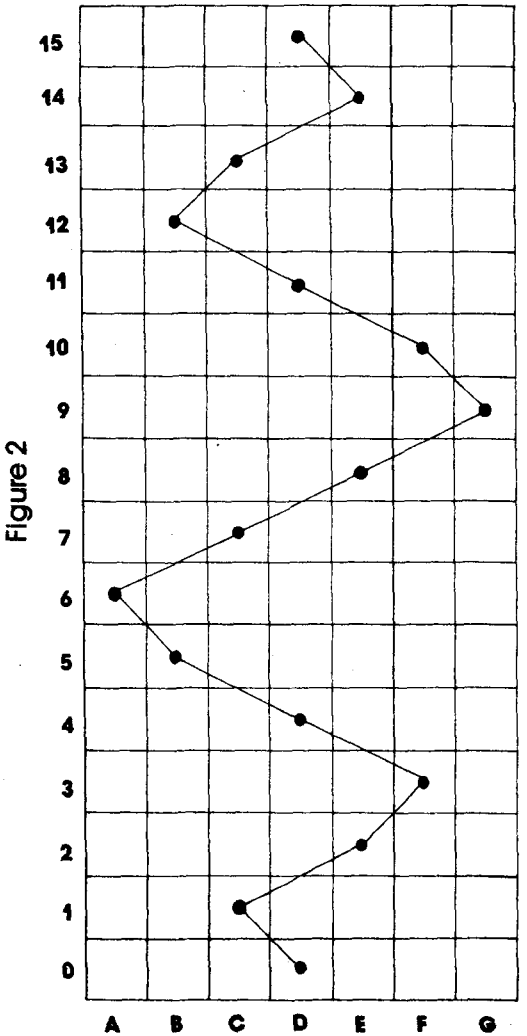

Figure 2

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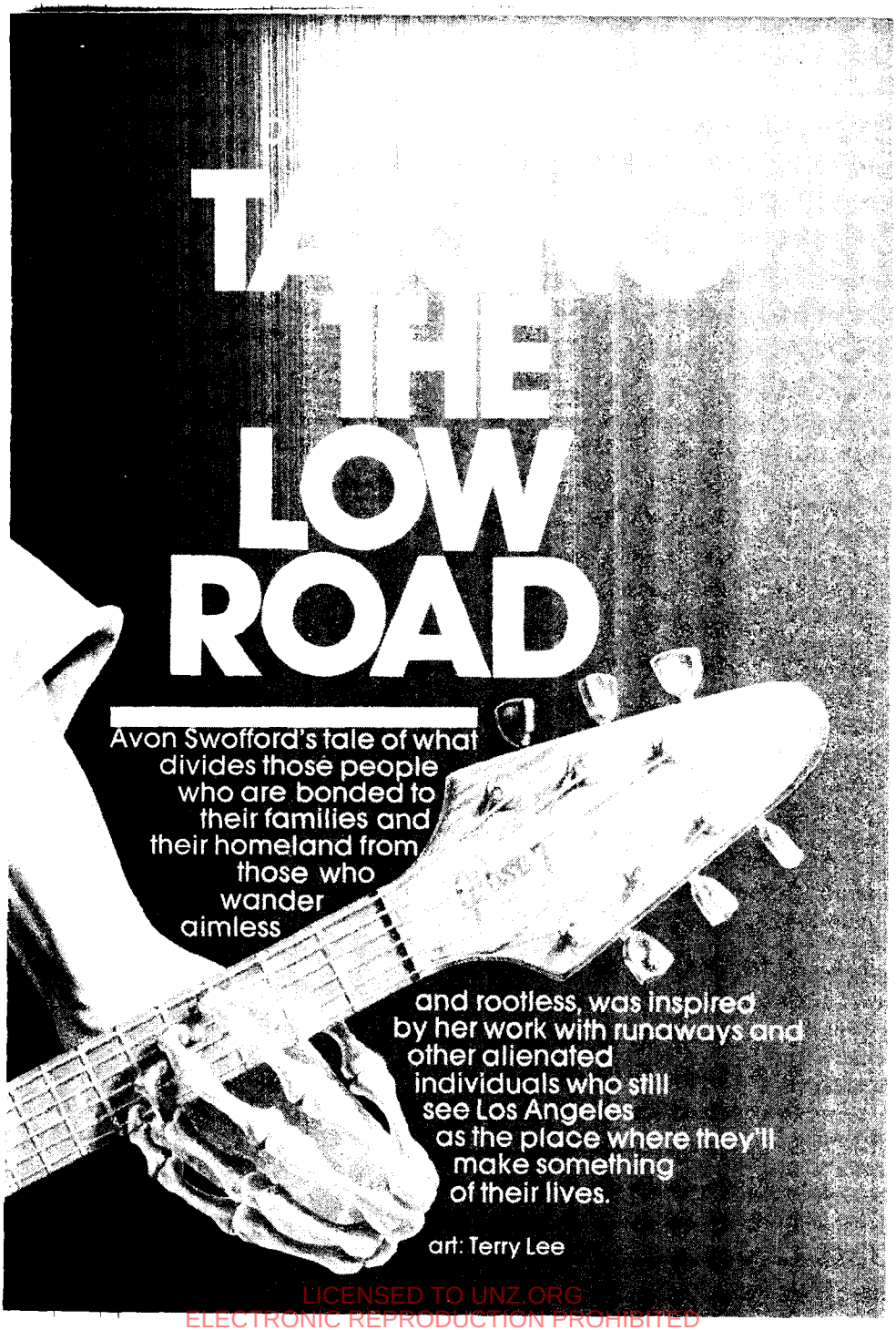
THE LOW ROAD
Avon Swofford's tale of what divides those people who are bonded to their families and their homeland from those who wander aimless
and rootless, was inspired by her work with runaways and other alienated individuals who still see Los Angeles as the place where they'll make something of their lives.
art: Terry Lee

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St. James's Park was quiet in the rapidly gathering dusk, a few green canvas deck chairs sprawled randomly across the grass. Joshua Blacknell shivered and thrust his hands deeper into his jacket, hunched his shoulders against the chill, and wondered who had been sitting in the park on such a cool day. It was early April. When he had left Los Angeles eight days earlier it had been warm, 80ish, and nearly summer. London, while dressed in more flowers than he had ever seen, was still cold, wet, and windy.

He had loved London from first sight, especially the flowers. Every corner was a splash of color, every park a kaleidoscope. Spring was new to him after five years of desert rain and heat. Even the cold receded finally, to a damp chill reminder. He felt more alive with each new experience—challenged, then fulfilled as he dealt with it.

All except the music. That he could not do. He'd come in search of new music groups, to get demo tapes to take back to LA. He wanted to be an A & R man, the one who spotted talent and brought it home. He wanted to find a new band. He'd been with Sunrise Records from the beginning, watching it develop as Tom Grossman, the president, had decided to concentrate on new music and new bands. Now it was Joshua's turn to take a chance. But so far nothing had happened, no great bands had been discovered, no stars waiting in the wings. Joshua was beginning to panic.

He had decided to try the phone numbers that Tom had given him, despite Tom's warning that "most were friends, not record connections." At first Joshua had ignored the numbers, but now he needed friendship.

Most were noncommittal and vague. But on the sixth call he got lucky. Her name was Robyn. She seemed pleased to hear an American voice on the phone, and laughed in delight when she heard he was a friend of Tom's.

"I hear Tom's a big shot now," she said. "I went to school with him in New Jersey."

They talked easily. Robyn had been in London for four years. She worked as a researcher in a library, but her passion was history, especially English history. She listened quietly as Joshua talked of his experiences and growing love for London.

He talked for a long time. He hadn't realized how isolated he felt. Finally, politely, she interrupted.

"Listen, why don't we meet tomorrow. I'll show you around."

"Of course," Joshua said. "Gladly. Are you—" he paused, uncertain how to phrase it. "Do you live alone by any chance?"

She laughed, a tinny yet crystal sound on the old phone. "No, I'm married. Sorry."

"Right," Joshua said dryly, and she laughed again.

They arranged the meeting then said goodbye. As Joshua hung up the

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phone, he tried to shake his disappointment that she was married. He didn't even know her.

Now, it was time to meet her. Joshua gave the park one last look, strangely reluctant to leave its quiet solitude, yet eager to meet Robyn.

Robyn stood waiting for him at his hotel. She was what her voice had promised: friendly but not flashy, her straight brown hair cut short around her ears, thirtyish but a young thirty.

She greeted Joshua tentatively on the steps as he came up to her. He held out his hand. A week of being anonymous in the bustling city had taken its toll. He liked her instantly.

She took him to a small American restaurant within walking distance. As they talked, Joshua found himself telling her most of his story, why he had come to London, what he hoped to find.

"I guess I was tired of just being an accountant. I wanted to do more."

"To be part of the glamor?" she asked.

He shook his head. "No, that's not it. I wanted to be responsible for something. When you're always surrounded by creative people, you want to be a part of it, to create something of your own. So I talked Tom into letting me come here to find a new band, shape them up a little and bring them home. It wasn't hard. I'm spending my own money and using my vacation time. If I find a band I like, he'll give them a listen."

"You must know a lot about music."

He shrugged, slightly embarrassed. "You pick it up," he said. "Here and there. You learn what's good and what isn't. Mostly you learn what isn't. After you hear about fifty bad bands." He winced, and she laughed.

"Sounds painful," she said and set down her glass. Joshua smiled slightly and did not tell her that that was not what frightened him the most. He had already been to several of the clubs that Tom had recommended. He had not dressed, although Tom, after looking at him critically, had advised it. He knew Tom's thinking. He was 35, firm because of regular jogging, but still, he looked his age. His brown hair was a bit longer than the style, his face softening in the wrong places, tiny wrinkles appearing, still subtle, but painfully visible to Joshua himself. He did not fit in. But he did not have the nerve to walk in with a coat and tie.

It didn't seem to matter. He had been ignored. The clubs were too large; he could not get near the bands, and he knew without asking that they already belonged to someone. So he had sat alone, unnoticed in the chaos.

"I must admit though," Robyn's voice broke through his thoughts. "I don't really like that sort of music. I guess I'm old fashioned, but I still like the Rolling Stones, the Beatles, that's my era. I can't get all that excited over the new wave stuff."

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Joshua shrugged again. "Some of it is good. Music is still music. What's good is what touches you, what you remember and sing over and over. Just because you may like another type of music better doesn't mean—" He stopped, leaned toward her and whispered, "You want to hear something funny?"

"What?" she said dropping her voice as well.

"It's not my favorite type of music either. I like the Beach Boys." She laughed while he teasingly tried to shush her.

"Don't tell anyone or I'll be ruined."

Still laughing, she shook her head. "You're in the wrong town." He shrugged and smiled.

"Doesn't matter," he said. "I'll find a group. I have to." The laughter was gone from his voice. "I can't stay much longer the way I am. I see myself growing old, sitting in a quiet dusty office off to the side and watching other people take chances. Sometimes they win, sometimes they lose dreadfully, but at least they got to try. I wouldn't mind losing if I could just take the chance."

She sobered too, and reached over to take his hand.

"You'll win," she said. "I know it." He smiled at her confidence and did not bother telling her that the odds were against him so strongly that he dared not think about it. But he appreciated the comfort. He stayed holding her hand for a moment too long and she withdrew it quickly. It was the only time they touched during the entire meal.

He tried some of the clubs that Robyn had suggested. They were smaller, some of them quite tiny. He also took to dressing up a bit in order to be recognized. It worked. People came over to him, and this time they believed him when he handed out his card and declared that he was a record company advance man. Even the bands began to notice, playing with an eye toward him.

Still the music was nothing, or at least it seemed that way. He couldn't really tell. He began to trust his instincts less and less. Until he found his band.

They were in one of the smallest clubs, The Nightwing, located in a basement off Kings Road. A recommendation from a friend of a friend, Robyn had said. The club boasted a visiting group named Coda, a Scottish band according to the posters, and kids were lined up outside waiting to go in.

Joshua looked them over carefully. He was already learning to take his cues from the kids, from their behavior, from how much they really listened to the music or just talked to their friends. They were to be his judges as much as his own suspect sense of music.

This crowd was good. They were a varied group, some full into punk with hair styles that would rival sculpture pieces at the MOMA. Others

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were solid working class kids, dolled up for the evening but with adornments that could all be removed on Monday morning. There were also some wealthier kids, dressed in exotic clothes with expensive labels. Coda obviously had a wide appeal.

Joshua went to the door and handed in his card and ten pounds. It was expensive but it had worked before, getting him in and seated before the stampede. Inside, the eager club manager rigged him a table on a slight ledge to the side of the dancing floor so that he could easily see the stage. The manager also spoke briefly about the band. They were really Scottish, it wasn't just hype. This was their first visit to London. They had gotten some very limited air play from a demo they had made in Edinburgh. Played occasionally by a local private station, it had acquired a small reputation.

The kids came pouring in with a rush, all looking up at him and pointing. Joshua enjoyed the notoriety. By the time the music started, everyone in the place would know that the old man in the corner was a big Yank record executive. The band surely knew already.

They came on nervously, glancing at him surreptitiously as they picked up their instruments. He smiled once or twice encouragingly.

There were four of them, three boys and a girl, all between 18 and 25, Joshua guessed. The girl kept glancing at him shyly from behind short, shaggy, red hair. She did not sing the lead as he had expected but picked up a guitar and stood to the right of the singer. He was tall and lean, skinny and knobby, his hair a light, almost white, blond color. He stared at Joshua once with dark, unreadable blue eyes. Joshua looked for hostility or challenge in that stare but saw nothing. Just a long searching glance of unfathomable meaning.

The boy did not look at him again, he simply stood and sang to the audience, giving his entire performance to them. It slowly began to work as the kids forgot to look at Joshua and started to dance.

At first after each song they would look back at Joshua as if he were a Roman emperor about to pass judgement. Joshua felt like holding up his hand, thumbs up or down, that was the incredible sense of power they gave him. And he noted with detached amusement that he slightly resented it when the blond boy went about trying to make the audience forget that Joshua was there, to make them look only at him. He succeeded. Soon Joshua himself was caught up in the music.

It was good music, solid in both lyrics and melody. The band alternated between fast aggressive songs and slow ballads. The most striking was a soft tune about Scotland, with some traditional lyrics woven in, old songs that even Joshua knew. He wondered if the boy had written it himself.

The audience stood attentive throughout the slow songs. The boy knew

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how to hold them. There was an eerie sense of power around him. He was a little like Bowie, Joshua thought suddenly, but not as distant, not as frightening. He looked lonely too, this boy did. He made you want to help him.

By the time the gig was over, Joshua was sure that this was it; this was the group he had been waiting for. They had affected him in a way that none of the others had. Now if only they were available. He made his way backstage past a huge cockney bouncer and a group of eager fans.

The band was waiting for him in one of the back rooms that the boys had used as a dressing room. They sat silently, three hunched together on the couch watching him intently. Only the tall, sullen singer was turned away. He stood in the back of the room staring out of a window half below street level, a window overlooking nothing but a set of concrete stairs, a rusting iron bannister and a chained bicycle.

The manager introduced them as John, Ian, Mary, and Arthur. They nodded as Joshua shook hands all around, Arthur coming away from the window momentarily, his eyes hooded and dark. Joshua held on to the limp hand just long enough to be polite then turned back to the worried eyes of Mary. She was not oblivious to Arthur's reluctance.

"You must forgive us," she said, the Scottish lilt in her voice bringing a slight smile to Joshua's face. "We're not expecting big record people, at least not on the first night." Joshua pressed his lips together to keep from laughing and asked the most important question.

"Have you talked to anyone else? I mean any other record company?"

The three on the couch shook their heads like children in a classroom. Arthur leaned against the wall and said nothing. "What about the record?" Joshua asked. "The one they play down here."

"Oh, that," Mary brushed it off with a wave of her hand. "We paid for that. Arthur went to Edinburgh and paid a studio to let us record it. It's how they make their money up there. Everybody's got a band now," she said disgustedly. Joshua nodded with sympathy. It did seem that way sometimes.

"We entered this contest," she continued. "The Festival held it for Scottish bands. We didn't get chosen but we made it to the finals. Somebody must have liked us, though, because we got called to do this gig." Joshua looked quickly at the owner who looked away. He must have heard the record on the radio and realized that he could fill the club at a very low cost. Joshua didn't ask what the kids were making.

They talked on. With the exception of Arthur, the musicians were eager. Joshua got the number of their hostel and promised to call. Arthur said nothing as Joshua stood to leave, but as they shook hands Joshua looked straight into his face and told him in a friendly voice that he

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would like to talk to him. Arthur nodded slightly and said he would be willing.

As the manager shut the door behind them he could hear Mary wailing at Arthur. He was going to have to change his tune or he would be out of the band.

The first thing to do normally would be to make a decision, to call Tom and get going. But when he got back to his room he did not pick up the phone. He didn't want to lose the kids, that would be a disaster, but he wasn't ready yet. He simply didn't trust his own judgement. And if he was wrong, that would be the end of his new job.

Besides, there was Arthur. Something was not right there.

Joshua undressed and lay on the bed staring at the stained, wall-papered ceiling of his tiny hotel room. There were two things he would do before committing himself. One made sense, the other did not. First he could call Arthur and speak to him privately. He would in fact speak to them all separately, but Arthur first.

Second, he would call Robyn and get her opinion. Just to see what she thought of the band, to get a woman's view of Arthur's appeal. And he admitted, smiling wryly in the darkness, it would give him a reason to see her again without pushing.

Reaching Arthur the next day was easy. He came immediately to the phone and accepted a lunch invitation. He sounded much friendlier than he had last night, and even suggested a restaurant a few blocks from his hostel. Joshua agreed to meet him.

The boy was sitting on the hostel stairs when Joshua arrived, his face and hands pale against the dark stone steps. Joshua paused momentarily at the bottom and stared. Yesterday Arthur had seemed distant and vaguely menacing. Now he seemed frail and light, as if any sudden gust of wind would send him reeling. Joshua nodded to him as they met, still unsure of his reception. Arthur stuck out his hand.

"I'm pleased to meet you," he said. "Mary says I wasn't very friendly yesterday. I didn't mean it that way. I was just surprised to see you."

Joshua smiled. Now Arthur seemed very young, much more in keeping with his 19 or 20 years. "You shouldn't have been surprised," he said. "You have a very good band. Somebody's going to be interested sooner or later. You made a good decision coming to London." Arthur shrugged and said nothing as they began to walk.

They did not talk much during the meal. Arthur asked a few questions about Los Angeles which Joshua answered with enthusiasm, praising the city highly. But mostly Arthur spoke of Scotland, of his love for his home in Damlen.

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"We're both loyal to our homes then," Arthur observed, then paused, puzzled. "But you're not from Los Angeles, not originally?"

"No," Joshua shook his head. "I'm from Virginia. Moved out to LA five years ago."

Arthur was staring at him intently now.

"But don't you miss it?" he asked. "How can you stand being away—being alone in the city?" There was a thinly disguised edge of fear in his voice.

Joshua leaned forward, surprised. "It's not so bad. You'll meet people. And you have the band." He took a wild guess. "You've got Mary." The blush that crossed Arthur's face and the sudden downturn of his eyes told Joshua that he had guessed right.

"It was her idea," Arthur said suddenly, almost savagely. "She wanted to come to London. Edinburgh wasn't so bad, I didn't mind that. But London," he shook his head sharply. "It's too far."

Joshua couldn't help but smile in spite of the boy's evident dismay. "LA's not so bad, you know. We're human too. If it's the crime that you're afraid of, I've lived there for five years and never been mugged. Never been murdered either."

But Arthur didn't laugh or look appeased. "You don't understand," he insisted, his accent deepening. "I canna go. It's not my choice. It's the way I am. I can't even stay in London much longer. I have to go back." There were very nearly tears in his voice and he turned away quickly, embarrassed at how much he had shown to Joshua.

Joshua was touched by his pain, but puzzled. "Why? I don't understand. Is it because you're homesick? Haven't you ever been out of Scotland before?"

Arthur shook his head. "Never," he said.

"What is it, Arthur? Why are you so frightened?" Joshua asked, leaning forward and watching Arthur intently.

Arthur hesitated, then spoke in a rush. "I can't leave," he said. "My family's been in Damlen for thousands of years—forever. We're part of the land." He paused and looked up at Joshua, an almost pleading look on his face. "We were given that land and we've got to take care of it. It needs us and we need it. Without it, we'll die." He finished simply, his hands crossed on the table in front of him as he watched Joshua, his eyes desolate. Joshua no longer had the urge to laugh, but he was speechless.

Arthur did not give him time to think. "You don't understand," he said sadly. "I knew you wouldn't. Your people are the different ones. I wonder sometimes, what it must be like in America. A whole nation of those who left. You have no home, not really. You're all so—" he struggled for words "—so short."

"Short?"

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"You don't go any further than yourself, you've got nothing else." Joshua started to interrupt, defensively but Arthur waved his hands impatiently. He spread out his hands in front of him, palms downward and looked at Joshua earnestly. "You're not connected to anything. I've got everything." He interlocked his fingers, and Joshua had a sudden image of a tree with branches reaching out, its roots hidden but firm. "I'm tied to it, to the land, to my family, to—to everything."

"You're a slave," Joshua said but Arthur was not offended.

"No," he said eagerly. "But no. Don't you see? You would see it like that because you don't have it. But it's safety, it's love, like a family. It takes care of me. I've no reason to leave it. It gives me everything."

"Except stardom, except a recording contract. Let's see Mother Earth give you that."

Arthur sighed miserably. "It's not me that wants it," he said softly.

"It's Mary," Joshua said with sudden dismay. "You want her and she wants to go."

Arthur nodded.

"But why?" Joshua asked. "Why isn't she like you?"

"I don't know," Arthur said. "There's always some who are born wrong. They belong somewhere but they don't know where. So they spend their whole life looking." He sighed and looked away from Joshua, then looked back determined to finish. "But I *know* that I'm Mary's place, Damlen is Mary's place. She just doesn't know it. She won't know until she misses it. Then she'll want to come home."

"She'll be cured of the wanderlust?" Joshua said sarcastically, drawing back from Arthur. He understood now. Not the logic involved, there was none, but the reality. Arthur's superstition would ruin everything. And there was nothing he could do. "So you're just going along until she sees the light. You don't give a damn about the band or the contract. This is just a game to you." He let his frustration and anger show in his voice and Arthur winced at the harshness of it.

"It's not," he said softly. "It's harder than I thought. I never expected you. We were to play here, then go home. I can't go to America. Not that far. I just can't."

Joshua snorted with anger but there was no arguing with Arthur. Joshua could feel the band dropping away from him all because of this boy's odd ideas.

They did not talk much after that. Joshua paid the bill and they separated at the door, Joshua watching as Arthur walked away.

He called Robyn that night, asking if she was free. At first she hesitated until he explained the reason; then she seemed very interested. They agreed to meet at the club that night.

He had forgotten to warn her how he would dress but she managed

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perfectly, wearing a sheer green blouse and jeans tucked into low fold-over boots. She managed to look both elegant and fashionable, although Joshua noted with some delight that she was as out of place as he was.

"I wasn't going to dress like them," she whispered as the manager escorted them in early. Tonight he was ready for his record man. The tiny table had been replaced by a larger one covered with a tablecloth, glasses, and a good bottle of wine.

The Nightwing was at least as full as before. Joshua thought he saw some of the same faces. And the band played even better than they had the first time, Arthur's voice ringing out above the instruments, not being masked by them like so many lead singers. He ignored Joshua's table, although the others continued to glance at him.

At the end of the set, Joshua took Robyn and sneaked out of the door.

"Aren't you going backstage?" she whispered. The manager followed them, his eyes mirroring the same concern. Joshua shook his head.

"No," he whispered back as they pushed against bodies in the half light. "I've already talked to one of them. Now it's time to make them sweat, put a little pressure on." She looked at him strangely but he did not explain until they were safely sequestered in a quiet restaurant nearby.

The restaurant had an appropriately romantic air with low lights, candles and tables far enough apart to give at least the illusion of privacy. Joshua made sure that the waiter put them in a far corner though he could see that Robyn was uncomfortable. "Is it okay?" he asked. She shrugged.

"I suppose. King's Road isn't exactly where my crowd hangs out. But," she smiled weakly. "It feels uncomfortable. As if I'm doing something wrong."

"It's perfectly innocent," Joshua protested.

"I know that, you know that, but do they?" She gestured around at the others in the half-lit room. Joshua looked slowly and fiercely at the oblivious couples around them, then back at her. She laughed as he had intended.

"I don't think they'll notice," he said.

"All right then. You win. Just an innocent evening. And you just want my opinion."

"I do actually. Very much so."

"As an expert," she said dryly.

"Like me," he said and she laughed again, far more comfortably. Then she paused and considered her words seriously before she spoke.

"I like them," she said. "You're right. They have a good sound. They play well and their songs are good. That one about Scotland, the third

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or fourth song they played," she hummed a bit of it, "that one stays with me; that one could be a pop hit. You'd make money."

Joshua nodded. "Arthur told me he wrote that one. He's good."

"Arthur," she said. "He's the one that sang, isn't he?" Joshua nodded. "I really like him. You know, the tall and melancholy type. There's something magnetic about him."

"Do you think the girls will like him?"

"Oh yes," she said laughing. "He needs mothering badly, or loving—or both."

Joshua grinned, then sobered up. "That boy's a problem though." He told her of his conversation with Arthur.

"Don't get so upset," she said. "He's just homesick. He'll get over it. But he's right about Americans. We are nomads. I read somewhere that Americans move every five years or so. No other developed country is like that."

"But he thinks he'll die. He literally thinks he'll waste away and die of—I don't know, consumption or something. It's crazy. And I've got to have him. I've got to have that band."

"Good lord," she said staring at him. "At the beginning of the evening you weren't even sure they were any good."

"I was, I am. They're the best I can do. If they don't make it then maybe I shouldn't be in music. Maybe I'm not good enough. I've got to trust my own judgement eventually. To have found them, then have this kid screw up—" He trailed off and shook his head in disgust.

Robyn was watching him closely. "It's not like he's doing it deliberately, Josh. Maybe this just isn't right for him. Californians seem to take it so personally when someone doesn't want their glitter. As if they know it's all an illusion and they don't want anyone else to notice that the emperor has no clothes. God forbid Arthur should want to go home and farm like his father," she finished sarcastically.

"He does," Joshua said dully. "That's exactly what he wants to do."

"Then let him," Robyn said. "Is it so hard? Find another band. You were just complaining on Monday about how many there were."

"But not like this one."

"You're getting fanatical," she warned. But he ignored her.

"The others want it," he said. "You should see how much. Especially the girl, Mary. She wants to come to LA." He paused. "Ugly, smoggy, fake LA—"

"I didn't say that."

"She wants it badly. He wasn't even going to come to London, but she got him to. He's in love with her."

"And now you're going to use her."

"I don't have to use her," Joshua snapped. "She'll do it herself or she

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won't. I'm not talking to Arthur any more. Besides, if this is what Mary wants, then what the hell is wrong with her getting it? He's being a fool, and if she talks him out of it then that's fine." He stopped and there was silence.

"I'm sorry," he said finally. "But I want them."

"Obviously," she said.

"We'll talk about something else," he said. "What else do we have in common?"

"London?" she said and he smiled.

They talked of London until the restaurant closed. The city was quiet and misty as they rode home through deserted gaslit avenues. He admired the rows of Georgian flats, and she happily launched into the story of their history, anything to fill the silence of the taxi. He looked at her fondly, letting the sound of her voice wash over him and soothe him as he watched her hair softly reflecting the gas lamplight. He was attracted to her, too much. He thought of staying with her, tonight, for many nights, of giving up and coming to London and staying, forever enchanted.

She caught his eye as the cab pulled up in front of her flat in Queensgate. He tried to compose his face but she saw him staring and looked away.

"I'm sorry," he said reaching out to touch her shoulder but she avoided his arm and slid out of the taxi. She turned to the driver and opened her purse. Joshua moved to the window and leaned out, protesting. She stopped him firmly and handed the driver ten pounds.

"That should do to get you home," she said to Joshua, "with a tip as well." He tried again to interrupt but she touched his face briefly then pulled her fingers back when she had his attention.

"I had a good time and I enjoyed dinner. It's only fair that I pay something." She paused. "You're easy to talk to. I feel as though we've been friends for a long time. I'm sorry that we didn't meet before . . . " She glanced up at the tall white row house and did not continue. Then she looked back. "Maybe I understand your boy singer a little better than you think. I need roots too, a home. Something that will stay the same while I'm changing—while I'm growing old." She leaned in the window and kissed him once on the cheek and was gone.

Joshua slid to the other window and watched her go up the stairs. As she fumbled for the key, the door opened. Joshua peered through the darkness at the lighted doorway but all he saw was a quick view of a small plumpish man with glasses and a dark sweater that looked rumpled and comfortable. Then the door closed behind them.

Joshua waited, watching until the porch light went out. Finally when

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the driver inquired, he waved him home, to a tiny hotel room that no longer seemed cozy, just cold and damp.

The next morning, the phone in his room was like a beacon. He had set Robyn's number next to it and it called him each time he passed. But he didn't phone her. Not because he didn't want to, but because he knew enough to play by her rules. He mustn't crowd her. He would play her the same way as he would Arthur, by standing outside and letting them make up their own minds. But he would make his offer as attractive as possible. Meanwhile, Mary was his next order of business.

He met her in St. James's Park. The sky was still gray, threatening rain, but it had warmed up enough for sweaters. Mary showed up early, waiting for him beside the entrance map by the Mall. She was dressed in jeans, a bright red top with a faded flannel shirt over it, sneakers and a well-worn jacket. She had also dyed her hair bright green. She smiled as she saw him, then apprehensively bit her lip as he began to smile.

"Is it horrid?" she said. "I thought it was nice, but if you hate it . . . " He laughed and put his arm reassuringly around her shoulder. She was small, just barely up to his shoulder, and so very young. He would have to make sure she was indeed nineteen as she claimed.

"It's fine," he said. "It's really rather tame by London standards."

"But not Damlen's," she said falling in step with him as they started down the path into the park. "My father would kill me if he saw it."

"He's going to see it eventually," Joshua said.

She grinned. "Not really. It's temporary dye. It's supposed to come out after six washings—at least that's what the package said." They both laughed at the timidity with which she said this. "I didn't want to do anything without asking you first."

He stopped and faced her. She was staring up at him with clear blue eyes, as accepting as Robyn had been secretive, as trusting as Robyn was suspicious. He thought of Los Angeles, of Tom, tours, road managers, all that was ahead of her. She would lose Arthur, or he her. They would lose their youth. For a moment Joshua wanted to stay in London more than anything. He wanted to stay with Robyn, live here, have children, a daughter who would trust him as openly as this girl did. He turned away from her, suddenly wishing that she were not here, that he had found another band.

"Don't say that," he said standing away from her, his hands in his pockets. "You don't have to do anything because I tell you to. Do only what you want, what you feel is right."

She watched him, puzzled. "All right," she said shrugging. "Okay." They began to walk again. Mary glanced at Joshua surreptitiously now and again, and he was amused. He was the bait now. She wanted him,

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not sexually, but his help, his influence, his power, as badly as he wanted Robyn.

The park was nearly empty in spite of the mild temperature; the children were in school, the lunchers back at work. Joshua and Mary stopped on a bridge crossing a narrow section of the lake.

They said nothing for a while as ducks and geese from all over the lake began to gather expectantly under the bridge, honking and quacking fiercely when there was no food forthcoming.

"Pushy little bastards, aren't they?" Joshua observed smiling. Mary giggled, bolder now that Joshua was over his anger.

"Look over there," she said and pointed through the leaves, leaning over the railing with the boyish grace of a very young woman. "See that building there?" He looked through the trees at the sedate gray columned building in the distance. "It's Buckingham Palace."

Joshua looked back at her, at the excited blue eyes beneath the bright green hair. "Did you ever want that?" he said. "To be a princess, I mean? To live there?"

She shrugged again.

"I guess," she said faintly, and looked at her feet, embarrassed. "When I was little. I think every girl did. Wouldn't you?"

"I wanted to be an astronaut," he admitted, "or a rock star."

She grinned widely and rocked back on her heels, her hands on her hips.

"We'll do it for you," she said firmly. "You'll see. We'll be your stars and you can come with us. You can take care of us." She paused then continued, her eyes suddenly narrow and crafty. "You could be our manager."

Joshua reacted with surprise. But she was right. That was what he wanted and she knew it. Finding a band was no longer enough; he wanted to be a part of one—this one. He smiled at her and she grinned back, her face eager and open again. They understood each other. He put his arm around her and they walked on.

Finally he broke the silence. "Tell me about Arthur."

Mary hesitated for several long seconds then sighed.

"I know what he told you," she said slowly. "He doesn't mean any harm. It's just that he believes that stuff. It's like a religion to him."

"But not to you?"

"No, of course not." Mary began twisting her jacket as she tried to think of ways to explain. "No. I'm different from Arthur. Ian and John are too. We live in the town, in Damlen. My family's been off the land for hundreds of years. Even when we lived on it, we were just tenants. Arthur's people owned it from the very first, for thousands of years.

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They've always been special. It goes back to the old religion, I think, before the new one now."

Joshua had to smile. The "new" one was over a thousand years old in Scotland. But Mary did not notice his smile. "We still have a spring festival every year. But the queen has to be one of them, one of the farm girls. Never a townie." She paused puzzled as to how to explain. "It's not a written down rule or anything. But everyone knows it."

"What happens if Arthur leaves Britain?"

"Nothing," Mary said loudly and Joshua could hear the exasperation in her voice. He had the feeling that she had had this discussion before with Arthur. "He's the oldest son, yes, but he has two brothers. It's not like anything would happen." Suddenly she turned on him, her eyes fierce with determination.

"You talk to him. He'd listen to you. Tell him that he's wrong. Make him see things the way that we do." She pleaded with him. "If you tell him, he'll believe you. I know he will. You *have* to make him understand."

Joshua shook his head, surprised by her sudden vehemence. "I can't make him do anything. He's got to decide for himself." He paused as she turned away dejected. "You could though," he said softly. "You could convince him."

Mary shrugged halfheartedly. "Maybe," she said. Then she stopped and pulled out from under Joshua's arm, unable to look at him as she asked, but equally unable not to ask.

"Could we go without him? Would the band work?" she said in a voice so faint that he could barely hear it. "Not that we'd want to," she continued quickly, trying to erase the impact of the words that had gone before. But the question was there, she had had to ask.

Joshua felt himself relaxing. This was what he needed from her. He had to know where she stood.

"No," he answered slowly. "It wouldn't. He's the center, without him there's no focus for the band." He smiled weakly and shrugged. "He's the magic one."

"Sure," Mary turned back towards him with a forced smile. "I know that. I was just kidding. We'd never leave him. I wouldn't—*I wouldn't.*" She looked at Joshua, her eyes wide, her face drawn, pleading for some sort of forgiveness. He put his arms around her.

"I know," he said gently and smiled down at her. He knew exactly what she meant. She would not let Arthur stay behind. She did love him, but she loved the band more, the dream was more powerful. Mary wanted this and for a moment, she had stopped being a child, and he saw her strength. Arthur had the magic, but Mary had the ambition. Arthur would not, could not stop this. Nor would Joshua. He would go all the way with this girl, give her everything he had. And in return he could,

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for a little while, be a part of it, after being an outsider for so long. He hugged Mary again, then they walked through the park together as she talked on about her plans for the future.

Joshua became a regular at The Nightwing. Though the band's repertoire was small, their performances were consistently good and Joshua was pleased. He spoke to the other two members of the group. They seemed to fit together as a unit. John, tall and red headed, did all the talking while Ian, a squat stocky boy, stood silent and nodded occasionally in agreement with his counterpart. Neither boy struck Joshua as Arthur and Mary had done. They were properly dull enough to be backup musicians. He suspected that that was all they would ever be.

Arthur continued to sulk, to the point of becoming physically ill. He grew pale and weak, a deep cough developing in his lungs. The cigarette smoke in the club made it worse, and occasionally he had trouble getting all the way through a performance, stopping to cough and sputter before he could get his breath.

Meanwhile, Joshua had called Tom. His boss seemed amused by his enthusiasm, letting him talk on and on until he ran out of breath and adjectives. Finally Joshua stopped, feeling foolish. He knew that Tom had heard all of this before, many times, but Tom laughed and said, "Yes, maybe. Get a hold of the demo they've already made." If it was good, he would listen.

They talked longer on other matters. Tom was amused to learn of Joshua's infatuation with Robyn.

"But you're so quiet in LA. You give the rest of us a bad name. Then you go to London and carry on like this. What are we going to do with you when you get back?"

Joshua actually blushed as he listened. He was older than Tom by two years and yet he felt so childlike when they talked. He wondered suddenly how much control he would really have over Coda once they got to LA. He would fight to keep them but would Tom allow that, especially if they hit?

After the phone call, everything changed for the band. Apparently Tom had called around to other club owners he knew for their opinions of this new group. Now with their engagement ending at the tiny Nightwing club, there were new offers coming in. The band came to Joshua for help. He booked them for a week in a much larger, higher-paying club.

They played the demo for Joshua on a borrowed stereo at the hostel, fidgeting nervously as he listened. Robyn had joined them at Joshua's request. Arthur came too, although he had only stood and glared when they had been booked into the new club. Joshua watched him as he

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listened to the two songs, his eyes closed, his thin blue-veined hands beating out a silent rhythm on the tabletop along with the music. However he felt about traveling, he obviously loved his music, and he loved performing. It was seductive, as Joshua well knew, and Arthur was caught. Joshua now felt that he could challenge the boy in front of the others.

He spoke to them as they were drinking coffee and beer in the den. They were filled with nervous excitement. Joshua waited while they talked themselves out. He had watched it all before with other groups. Now for the first time it was *his* group. When there was a pause of more than a few seconds he spoke.

"It's good," he said. "It will do and I'm glad. Because I've got a stake in this, too. More than I think you realize." They fell quiet and looked at him, three friendly glances and one guarded one. Arthur knew this was the showdown.

"I'm new at this. I was sent to London to see what I could do. This is my big break. I get to choose one band to go to LA. If you hit, I've got a career, too. If not, it's back to the desk with me. So I've got to know. Are you going or not? Because if you have any reservations, I have to know now, before I make a fool of myself."

He looked around the room. The others did not speak. The speech was for Arthur and everyone in the room knew it. The boy pushed away from the wall suddenly and crumpled his styrofoam cup, throwing it almost savagely at the trashcan. Joshua felt a sudden stab of pity for him. He shouldn't have had to embarrass Arthur in front of everyone, but he had to know.

Arthur made one more plea to Mary. He walked over and bent over her, his eyes but not his words hidden to the rest of the group.

"Please," he said. "Let's go back. We can now. It's not too late. Nothing's going to happen in LA; it's all a lie. This sort of thing just doesn't happen. Don't you see? They probably get thousands of these demos a year. We're not even going to get to LA."

"Joshua says—"

Arthur exploded with a fury that his frail body scarcely seemed able to contain. "Joshua doesn't know. He's nobody. He can't do anything. He doesn't even belong in LA. He doesn't like the music; he doesn't like the city. He wants to stay here in London, ask him if he doesn't. He's afraid to go home. There isn't anything there for him so he's taking us—you."

Joshua listened, his stomach knotting. He did not know how the boy knew, but it was true. He did not want to go back alone. In these past few weeks he had felt more alive, seen more, done more than in five years in Los Angeles. He needed the band and he needed Robyn. He

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glanced at her quickly but she was intently studying the pattern of the faded rug beneath her feet.

"It doesn't matter what Joshua thinks or says," Mary said quietly. "It's what I think, what Ian and John think. We're not being led anywhere we don't want to go. You said we'd never get out of Scotland, then you said we'd never get a club in London. Now we've as many as we want. We're going to do this. We want you; we need you, but we will do it without you." Arthur drew in a breath so quickly that it triggered a spate of coughing. Mary took pity on him. "But we don't want to." She stood and took his hands.

"Arthur please, I—" She faltered as if suddenly aware of the others in the room. "I want you. I want us to be together." She decided that it didn't matter who was listening. "I love you." He stared at her for a moment.

"You don't understand," he said. She sighed, dropped his hands and turned away. Her rejection was more than he could stand. "I love you," he pleaded. "I do."

She turned back toward him, her eyes blazing, her arms crossed tightly across her chest, her anger fierce and frightening.

"Then prove it," she said as she faced him, almost on tiptoes. "Prove it." Arthur swayed, stunned by her outburst. For a moment he stared at her in anguish, then crumbled before her ferocity.

"All right," he said softly dropping his eyes and staring at the carpet, his voice barely audible. "I'll go with you. I will—please—" His voice faded. Mary held firm for a moment longer, then softened as she reached up to touch his face and soothe him.

Joshua released his breath in a sudden gust. He realized that he had been holding it for almost a minute. This was it. Mary's gamble had worked. From now on Arthur was committed. He stepped forward and embraced both Mary and Arthur, Arthur resisting at first then yielding. Joshua, his arm across the boy's back, could feel a slight trembling. He did the same for John and Ian who seemed slightly embarrassed by his exuberance.

Then he stood back and looked at the four of them. "Now," he said, "the first thing on the agenda is to get Arthur to a doctor. Find out what's wrong and then we'll fix it."

"There's nothing a doctor can . . . " Arthur started, but Joshua interrupted.

"I don't believe that nonsense, Arthur. A person can't die of homesickness. You can mope yourself to death, that I'll acknowledge, although how you can do that when you have a woman like Mary around I don't understand." She grinned at her shoes; Arthur just shuffled with embarrassment. Then Joshua laid a hand on Arthur's shoulder. When the

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boy looked at him, Joshua stared straight into his eyes. "Trust me. Nothing is going to happen. I'll take care of you, all of you. I won't let anyone or anything hurt you." Arthur said nothing as he searched Joshua's face. Joshua held as still as possible. The boy seemed to want this assurance but whatever held him wouldn't quite give up.

"Arthur, I promise," Joshua said. For a moment longer Arthur stared, then he dropped his eyes and nodded faintly.

"Okay," Joshua said as he stepped back and took Robyn's hand. He squeezed it and she smiled up at him, but it was an odd smile, searching, almost bewildered as if she hadn't quite understood what had happened.

"Let's celebrate," Joshua said. They did.

They spent the rest of the week together, Robyn joining them often. She seemed genuinely fond of the kids, and their presence made it easier for her to be around Joshua.

The band spent the time eagerly planning what they would do when they got to Los Angeles. Joshua managed to bring Arthur into the conversations by talking of his music and asking about the future. Where was Coda going? What sort of music did Arthur want to play, if he had complete freedom? Joshua knew he risked increasing their disappointment if Tom said no, but he wanted to keep Arthur involved.

The boy did go to the doctor, triumphantly bringing Joshua the report that aside from a bad chest cold and slight asthma, he was in good health.

Joshua also spent time alone with Robyn. Her husband had gone to the Continent on business for several weeks. Joshua had said nothing when she'd told him. She simply stated it and moved on, but it put pressure on her. They both knew that. And they were both involved. It was not just Joshua. He could feel that she wanted him too, in the way she held his hand, the freedom of her laugh and voice when they were talking of something else, something unimportant.

Finally she took him home. The flat wasn't as luxurious on the inside as out, but it was elegant in a simple way with polished wood floors, wooden chairs, a faded sofa, high steep stairs, and low doors. He loved it immediately and moved in with his mind. He could easily make this place a home.

He moved awkwardly as she brought him a drink, and they sat at opposite ends of the couch. He did not want to force her; he knew now that that would be the best way to lose her.

They talked for hours, deep talk, intense words of hopes and dreams and past lifetimes. Then she stood to put her drink on the fireplace mantel. Joshua moved behind her and put his arm around her waist. She stiffened briefly, then leaned back against him, her eyes closed.

"For tonight," he said. "Just for tonight." For several long moments she said nothing. Joshua waited, his face in her hair, smelling her fra-

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grance. Then she nodded briefly, took his hand and led him to the bedroom.

Joshua did his best to please her, to try and get some response from her, but even as her body moved rhythmically with his, she said nothing. Afterwards, as she lay in his arms, he tried to talk to her, but she would not give in.

"I love you," he told her.

"You don't," she said, "not really. Here and now maybe, but not forever."

"I do."

"Then stay," she said. Her words came out quickly with the nervous rush of an often rehearsed phrase finally spoken aloud. "Stay in London; stay with me." Joshua rolled away from her and sat up surprised and dismayed.

"I can't," he said finally. "There's too much at stake, the band, the contract. This might be my break."

"That's just chance, this is real." She paused but he did not answer. "Joshua, I love you."

He flinched from the naked pleading tone in her voice. "I can't stay," he said with deep despair. "I can't." He waited but she was quiet, her eyes closed, listening. Joshua waited until he could stand it no longer. He had to fill that awful silence.

"Come to LA with me," he blurted out. She said nothing. The words hung in the air.

Finally she opened her eyes and spoke, her voice even. "If the band hits, would you want me? I mean really want me there, at home, to tie you down. Or am I just another part of London, romantic here but a burden there?"

There was a pause that Joshua wanted to fill, meant to fill, but his mind took the question and started turning it over, considering it, and the pause grew into a silence that was too long and too late, and Joshua knew that she was right. He would protest and deny, but he knew in that instant that what she had said was true. She was part of London's lure, a romantic myth that he had created. In California, she would be extra. She had no dream of her own. She would simply wait while he was on the road or in a recording session, someone to call, someone to hurry back to when he wanted to stay with the group. In that too-long pause, he saw Robyn outside of London, away from her home, and he saw a shrew, a nagging, clutching thing, anchoring him when he only wanted to be free. Could he have the band, really have it and keep Robyn too? That was the real question and the answer was no. He and Mary were one of a kind. The ambition, the elusive dream was more important than the love around them.

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He said words to ease her. Of course he wanted her, of course she would fit in. But he could hear the falseness in them and she did not bother to reply. Instead, she turned away from him and curled up on the other side of the bed. He stared at her smooth curving back, bleached bone white by the moonlight coming through the window, and stilled an impulse to touch her, to explain that he did want her, did love her. But not enough, he knew that.

He lay for a long time debating whether to leave. He thought that he should; such things were rarely better in the morning. But it was cold out, and he had nowhere to go, nowhere but a dreary, empty hotel room. He stayed, watching Robyn as she slept. Sometime in the early morning he too slept.

When he awoke, the faint light of early dawn was showing through lace curtains onto a half-empty bed. He sat up, thinking that she had left the house, run out somewhere, but then he heard movement in the kitchen. He stood up shivering and considered putting on the man's robe he saw hanging on the back of the chair. But it did not seem wise, not after the way they had left things last night. He dressed instead.

She was in the kitchen, fixing breakfast, clad in an old bathrobe of her own. If she noted that he was fully dressed, she did not comment. Instead she indicated a chair with a wave of her hand.

"I fixed you breakfast before you go," she said. "Better than the one at your hotel." Joshua nodded quietly. He had never seen her angry; that was not an emotion they had experienced in the last four weeks, but he knew he was seeing it now. Her shoulders were stiff, her lips tight, her eyes devoid of any expression. She turned toward the stove when she realized he was staring. He knew she was lost to him. He sipped at the coffee, waiting for her to speak. When it became apparent that she would not, he started.

"It takes two," he said keeping his voice quiet. "I did not seduce you; we are not in high school."

"I wanted something to last," she said, her voice still level and controlled. "I thought you were ready to make some kind of commitment. But you're not. You're just in the business of building up hopes."

"What about you?" he said, so loudly that she flinched. "I said I'd take you back to LA with me. But you won't leave. Arthur's willing to go. Look at all he's giving up."

"Arthur is too young. He doesn't understand that he doesn't have Mary. He never had Mary."

Joshua started to argue then thought of the scene in the park, of Mary's ashamed but determined eyes. She would have left Arthur if he had refused to go with her. She might still.

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He looked back up at Robyn. She was still speaking, though she seemed further away.

"At least my husband will be here," she said. "No matter what, I can count on him."

"Nothing lasts," Joshua said. "Nothing. And you're a fool if you think it does."

Robyn turned back to the sink and roughly began to stack the dishes. "Not even the band?" she asked finally. "What happens after six months or a year? They won't last any longer. You know that. They'll come back bitter and disappointed. If they come back at all. You want everyone to suffer like you have, to be as rootless as you. You can't have what they have, so you make them want something different."

"I'm not making them want anything," he snapped. "Nobody's making them."

"It was just a dream, just something to grow up on. Until you came. Now they've got to have it because you made it real."

"Not Mary. She wanted it all along."

"She used to want Arthur. And all Arthur ever wanted was her. But you took her away, then bribed him with her." She turned to face him, her voice weary.

"I told you that I wanted friendship, nothing more. You're right, I'm not in high school, but I wasn't ready for you." She laughed suddenly, a sharp bitter sound. "I believed it too, you know. I bought into your dream. But now it's gone, it's dead. The same thing will happen to Mary, to Arthur."

"I deal in reality," Joshua said defensively. "It's not easy but sometimes it's worth it. You have to want something bad enough to hurt for it. I do, they do. I thought you did or I wouldn't have pushed you. I can't opt for safety, not like you. I want more."

She leaned back against the sink and stared at him. "You don't know what you want," she said quietly, her voice empty of all emotion. "If I went with you, you'd leave me tomorrow. Or today. Love isn't enough for you. It isn't even all that important." She paused and stared at her hands gathering her thoughts for another assault, Joshua thought, but she seemed almost oblivious to him, as if she were trying to explain to herself as well as to him.

"This ambition, this search, whatever you want to call it, it's your religion, yours and Mary's, your holy grail. There's no way that I could take part. I'm something else. You'd have to choose between us.

"Prove it?" he said sneering. "Is that what you mean?"

She sighed sadly and he was instantly ashamed. "I know better than to ask," she said softly. "Besides, I have the best revenge. A year from now, you'll be a memory, a brief bittersweet smile at a spare moment.

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But I'll be with you forever. London and I will always be the chance you missed and you'll wonder for the rest of your life how it might have been. And maybe someday, when the music fails, you'll spend all your energy looking for this, trying to recapture it." She stopped for a moment, then continued, her voice hard. "But don't you ever come back here. This is over. It is no more. You and I will never see each other again." She turned away, dismissing him completely.

Joshua pushed away from his uneaten breakfast, picked up his coat from the living room and walked out. As he shut the door behind him, he could see her at the kitchen table staring into her coffee cup. She did not look up as he closed the door.

He wandered aimlessly for hours, first among office workers clutching briefcases, then jostling school children, and finally tourists and shoppers. He ended up in St. James's Park again.

By now it was late morning on one of the prettiest days yet. It was still chilly, the breeze cutting sharply through his jacket, but the children were in shorts, the women in bright spring dresses.

They couldn't wait any longer, he thought. So pale and white, the children found sun wherever they could. And workers, in shirt sleeves, came out for an early lunch in the park among the baby ducks and flowers—all the spring moments that were missing from the perpetual summer of Los Angeles.

He had missed these things; he did notice. Once, five years ago when he had first arrived in the desert, a small bush outside his door had lost its leaves. They didn't turn colors, they simply died and fell to the ground, but he had heard the wind blowing through them and had gone outside, the sound calling him with a sudden stab of homesickness. He had stood and shuffled through those leaves, fifteen or twenty at the most, and felt the pain of not being home, of not being where he belonged. But that had been it. He had put aside that pain for dreams of the future, five long years ago. A future that had not come. Now what of these four youngsters? Were they simply one more step in his search for—what? For a home, for success, or just a place to stop without wanting more? Maybe this was that place.

But he couldn't stop. What if he did? Then what? He had been moving for so long that the idea of standing still was alien to him. He could not conceive of the search being over.

He sat on a bench for hours and waved away pigeons, his mind empty, resting.

Finally he went back to the hotel. There was a letter for him, lying against the pillow on the newly made bed. It was from Tom, a contract to make a single in LA. Tom agreed with his assessment of the band's abilities. Joshua stared at the letter, turning it over in his hands. He

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should have been pleased, should have danced across the room with delight, but now he just stared. Was it what he really wanted?

He called the hostel and got Mary on the line. He asked the group to meet him for dinner at six at the same restaurant where he had met Arthur. He would not tell her why, though he knew that she thought from the gravity of his voice that they had been turned down. Then he lay back on the bed and slept until evening.

The youngsters were at the restaurant when he arrived, hunched together as if for protection.

"All right," Mary said before he had even sat down. "What is it, then? Let's have it. They said no?"

"No," Joshua said, smiling slightly at her belligerence. "They said yes."

"What?" she gasped as they all looked at each other, and Arthur was lost in a fit of coughing.

Joshua opened the letter, pulled out the contract and put it on the table. Mary snatched it up. "It's a contract," she said in disbelief.

Joshua nodded. "Only a short one," he said. "Just for a single. They'll pay your way to LA in exchange for exclusivity and first crack at signing you long term if they like what they hear. They already like it or they wouldn't be shelling out this money."

Mary started laughing as John and Ian waved beer mugs and cheered. Arthur stared at his drink.

"Do you know," Mary said finally, "what kind of afternoon you've put us through? I thought from your voice on the phone that they'd turned us down. We've been consoling each other and trying to think of how we could raise the money to go to Los Angeles ourselves."

"Is that what you'd do then?" Joshua asked. "If I wasn't here, if you didn't have this contract? Would you still come?"

"Of course she would," Arthur said, his voice low and husky. "Nobody could stop her now." Mary nodded vigorously and started to speak.

"No, wait," Joshua held up his hand to stop her. "I want you to understand. You can still back out now. It's not too late. This is real; it's not a game anymore. LA is different. They'll use you, get the best they can, then drop you. If you don't make it the first time, they won't give you a second chance. You could be back here within six months, in two weeks, if they don't like you." His voice sounded almost anguished as he leaned over the table focusing mainly on Mary. "It's not like being princess," he said and put his head in his hands. There was silence around the table. When she still did not respond he looked back at her. She was staring at him intently.

"Why did you change?" she said finally. He didn't answer. "It's Robyn, isn't it? She left you, or you left her, or something happened and now you're worried about what you're doing to us."

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Damn her, Joshua thought in some back part of his mind. She's just a child; she shouldn't understand this. "I don't want you to lose Arthur," he said. "I don't want you to lose your home, your family—" he paused and searched for words, "your selves."

"It's okay," Mary said. She reached out and touched his hand. "We know what we want. We'll go with you or without you. If you come too, you can help. I trust you; we all trust you." She shrugged. "You care. That's obvious. And we care about you. And that's a good thing. Robyn cares too. I think she loves you."

Joshua began to shake his head. "Don't," he said. "Don't get involved in that. It's over. It should never have ever started. We can't always have what we want. I want you to know that."

"Okay," she said simply. Joshua nodded and left it at that. He didn't want to talk about Robyn. He sat silently as Ian, John, and Mary read over the contract and talked excitedly. Arthur slid over beside Joshua and spoke only once but his words were surprising.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I know she's right. You do care. It's her, not you." He paused and breathed in. Joshua could hear the wheezing in his chest. He watched Arthur's glassy eyes with concern. "It's too late—always was, I think. She's a wanderer, as much as I'm not. But she's a part of me, like Damlen. I can't leave her. Going back without her would be worse than—" he paused then finished softly, "than anything." He was going to say "dying," Joshua thought, and suddenly that wasn't so far-fetched. He thought of Robyn, of her words and of Mary's in the park.

"Are you sure," he said anxiously. "Maybe you should go back, maybe the band isn't right . . . " He trailed off. It was the best he could do. He loved the band too much to go further.

"I'm sure," Arthur said and smiled a feeble smile. It disappeared quickly. "I have to try. It's what I want. If I can just see this the way you and Mary do, if I can just believe in it enough, it'll be all right."

Joshua left them shortly afterwards for more walking, this time along a dark and deserted street lined with graceful Georgian row houses and wrought iron gates, all lit with muted gas lamps, evoking memories of another, gentler era. The very shadows seemed to call him to join them in their elegant clothes and carriages in an age of noblemen and minuets. He wondered suddenly if he had lived before, if this could explain his strange urge to stay, to settle in and never look back. Then again, maybe Robyn was right. Maybe he was just tired of looking. But he had the band now. He needn't look any further.

They left two days later, on the same flight that Joshua had originally booked himself to leave on. He stood in the waiting area watching the crowd pass by. Robyn knew he was planning to leave today; she knew

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what time. Joshua searched the terminal, hoping that maybe she would come to say good-bye—to say something. But there was no sign of her.

Arthur had moved up alongside him, standing silently until his coughing gave him away. Joshua turned toward him, trying to mask his concern. The boy looked worse than ever.

"You let her go," Arthur said. It was not a question. Joshua shrugged uncomfortably under his stare. "You sent her away. Now you're alone."

"I couldn't do it," Joshua said suddenly. "Not like you. I can't love like that." He turned to stare into the boy's eyes and saw age, a wisdom beyond Arthur's years. Arthur understood something that he did not, could do something that Joshua could only imagine. Joshua did not and had never loved that much.

"I envy you," he said simply. Arthur watched him for a moment longer, then smiled, a free and easy smile.

"I chose this," he said. "I trust you and I love her. Is that enough?"

Joshua watched, without an answer, without a clue, though he suddenly wanted to call the boy back, to say no, not me, don't trust me. But Arthur was gone quickly, silently down the boarding tunnel.

Joshua stared after him, his heart beating rapidly, a sudden touch of cold running down his spine. He shook his head trying to break Arthur's spell. But he waited as long as possible before boarding the plane, shooing the band members ahead of him, then standing in the nearly deserted waiting room searching desperately, hoping that she would come—needing her. But she did not. Finally he moved through the boarding gate.

He ended up sitting next to Ian. It was a good chance to get to know the quiet, heavy-set boy. But they did not talk during take-off. Ian had the window and he watched with fascination as they flew low across London's red roofs, calling out occasionally as he spotted a landmark.

Joshua watched too, over Ian's shoulder, with a lingering sense of sadness and loss as he saw the city fall away below them, the Thames growing smaller until it was a tiny swath of blue-gray ink on a giant map. Joshua felt his throat close slightly and shook his head. This was ridiculous. He'd only been here for five weeks. He'd be back, he was sure of it. Now he was going home. But the word held nothing for him.

He turned away from the window. When the seat belt sign went out he walked forward and checked on the others.

Mary had the window on her side and she too had her face pressed to the glass. Arthur's head was turned toward the aisle, his eyes closed. His breathing was forced, a harsh and wheezy sound rattling through his chest each time he inhaled. But he was asleep and after a moment's hesitation Joshua left him to rest.

The plane grew quiet as night fell. Joshua was almost asleep when

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suddenly there was a commotion several rows ahead. Joshua watched through lowered eyes but didn't investigate, trying to convince himself that it was none of his business, that he need not be concerned. Sleep dulled him enough to allow this until the stewardess called for a doctor on the speakers. The lights came on and Joshua reluctantly stood as Ian sat up and stated what he already knew. "It's Arthur."

When he walked up, Mary grabbed his arm. She had been pushed aside by the stewardess. Arthur was stretched out across three seats and was being attended by an elderly English doctor. Arthur was breathing shallowly, his horrible wheezing almost gone.

Mary leaned against Joshua weeping and babbling. "He fainted. I thought he was asleep, his breathing was so much easier that I thought he was resting. I didn't know. Not until he sort of drooped out of the seat half on the floor and I couldn't wake him up."

"All right." Joshua soothed her gently, trying to hear the doctor's words over her weeping. "How is he?" he asked the most accessible stewardess. For a moment she said nothing, then noting a much quieter Mary clinging to his side, decided that he was legitimate.

"He's very sick," she said. "The doctor says we've got to land as soon as possible. Canada's the closest. We'll care for him as best we can until then."

They moved Arthur to the back of the plane. Joshua carried him. The boy's long legs knocked into seats as they passed down the aisle, but he weighed nearly nothing. When Joshua set him down, he opened his eyes for just a moment. Joshua tried to pull back but couldn't. Arthur's arms tightened around his neck with a strength that surprised him.

"You should have stayed," he whispered into Joshua's ear.

"No," Joshua said bringing his hands around to break Arthur's feverish grip. "I couldn't."

"There's only one chance," Arthur said urgently. "They only give you one chance. If you don't take it, you're lost." He shook his head slightly and closed his eyes. "I thought she was my chance, she—and you." Then he spoke once more, so softly that Joshua could barely hear him. "I thought you were stronger. I believed you." The boy lay back limp, his eyes closed, his hands falling easily now to his side.

Joshua looked up gasping but those around him seemed not to have noticed the brief conversation, all except Mary. She looked at him and he realized that she was as frightened as he.

"What?" she said grabbing his hand. "What did he say? Did he speak?" Her voice was shrill. "What's happening?"

"Nothing, love," the doctor said as the stewardess reached for her. "He couldn't have said anything. He's unconscious I think. Sit down. We'll take care of him."

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Joshua stumbled away toward the rear of the plane until the voices faded. He was cold, so very cold. He moved back next to the galley, drawn to a light coming through the airplane's rear door. He hunched down and peered through the window.

It was daylight. The sun was rising. Below there was only blue-grey ocean, broken occasionally by a white speck. Icebergs. There was no land. Joshua pressed his face against the cool plastic trying to see beyond the limited horizon, and fought a sudden chilling premonition. Something was going to happen. He could feel it. Arthur's gods, Arthur's vengeful gods were now to be faced. They had offered him a place, showed him where he belonged. But he'd ignored them. Worse, he'd taken Arthur. Now they would punish, both him and Mary.

"I'm sorry," Joshua begged silently, searching the horizon. If only he could see something, some land, anything. But there was nothing. All was silent and cold, waiting.

They hit an air pocket. The plane shuddered then dropped suddenly. There was a gasp in the cabin as if everyone had caught their breath at once; then came cries, some rapid words, calls for the stewardess. Then Mary's scream came louder and Joshua knew that Arthur was dead.

He reached for the nearest seat and peered over. He saw Mary on her knees, Arthur's head and shoulders cradled in her arms. She was oblivious to the chaos around her. "Alone," Arthur had said. "You'll be alone."

"No," Joshua whispered hoarsely but no one heard him. He knew that he should go to her, but he could not. There was nothing to say. It was over. He had no more dreams to give her.

His breath coming in ragged gasps, he pushed away from the seat and stumbled back to the window. He pressed against the window again and thought wildly of Robyn, of one specific moment when they had been walking along the Thames. In that instant, among the flowers, the woman, and the river, he had felt a harmony—had seen just for a moment an opening, a place for him to slip into the weave of time and history, a niche that was his and his alone. But he had ignored it, and it closed. Now he had lost her; he had lost Arthur and Mary; he had lost his own future, and he had lost his innocence. He would continue the search bu there would never be another chance, and he knew it, with a fatal certainty that would follow him for the rest of his life.

He pressed against the plastic and wept, desperately searching the icy grey water below him for land, wanting—needing—just once more, a glimpse of that place that was his. But there was nothing. Finally he shut his eyes and slid down on the carpet. No one came to him; no one noticed him. He sat alone and quiet until the plane started its descent into Los Angeles. ●

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LEXICAL GAP

—after watching an episode of
NOVA on shapes in nature

Sphere! Helix! Polygon!
Spiral! Branch! Meander!
You can jump rope to that.
It's a shapely set.

And the scientists say:
This is no little trivial incantation.
No! This is the lexicon of All There Is.
Sphere. Helix. Polygon.
Spiral. Branch. Meander.

Sphere: the green pea; the water drop.
Helix: the green pea's vine; all DNA.
Polygon: the snowflake; any old stone.
Spiral: the snail's slow shell; the sunflower's center.
Branch: the red maple; any old neuron.
Meander: the way of the serpent; the way of the river.

Sphere, *Helix*, *Polygon*,
Spiral, Branch, Meander . . .
it goes round and round.
But I tell you:
There is a Seventh Shape.
Peeking out.

—Suzette Haden Elgin

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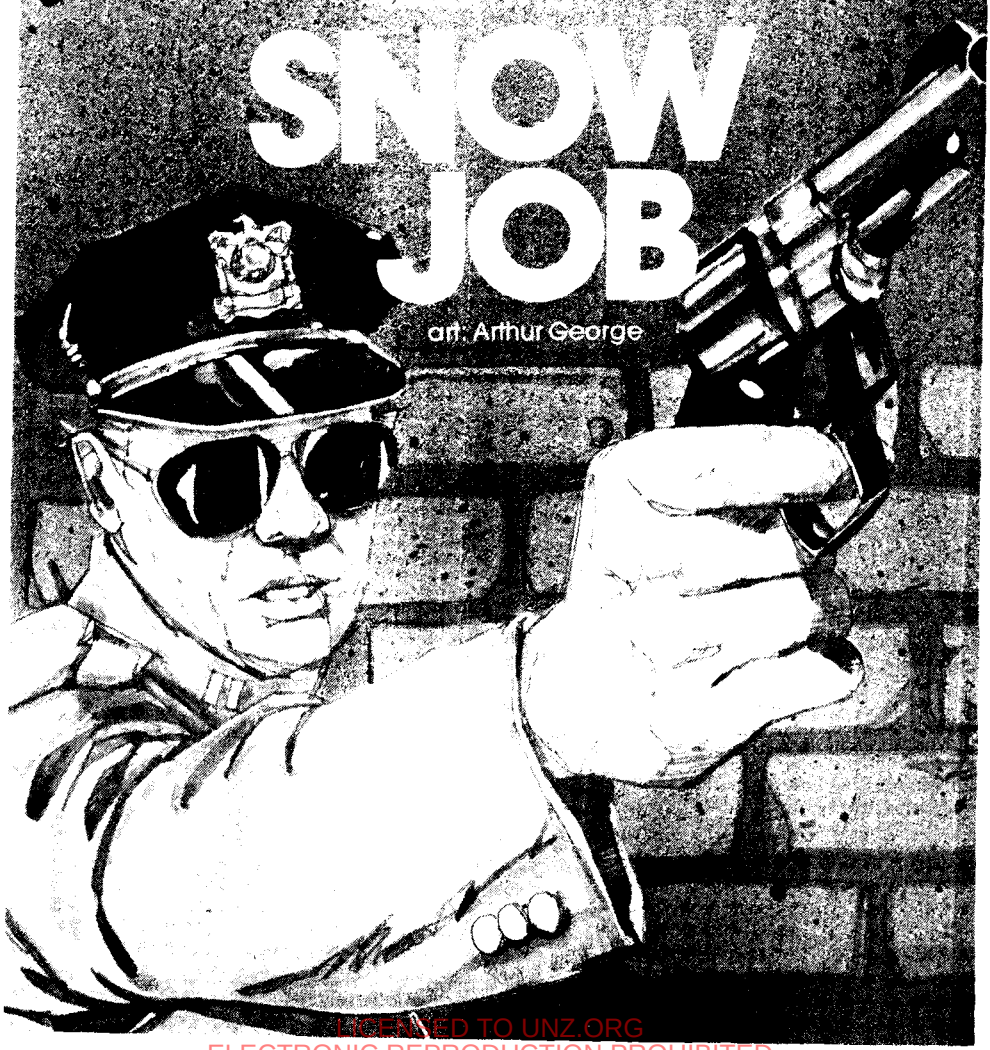
by Gardner Dozois and Michael Swanwick

One Of Gardner Dozois's most recent appearances in *IAsfm*, "The Peacemaker" [June 1983], netted him a Nebula award for best short story. Michael Swanwick's "Marrow Death" [Mid-December 1984] was a finalist for the 1984 Nebula award for best novella. These two talented writers both live in Philadelphia and "Snow Job" is an amusing collaborative look at a sting operation which backfires on its perpetrator.

by Gardner Dozois and Michael Swanwick

SNOW JOB

art: Arthur George



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Have you ever toured the Harding Dam in Boulder, Colorado? Have you ever caught that old Errol Flynn movie about the life of Lord Bolingbroke, the man who restored the Stuarts to the British throne and overran half of France but who "couldn't conquer the Queen he didn't dare to love," a real classic, also starring Basil Rathbone and Olivia deHavilland? Have you?

Of course you haven't—which shows what a difference a single line of coke can make.

If it weren't for the coke, the blow-off wouldn't have come hot, and things would have been very, very different.

Just how different, you don't realize. You *can't* realize, in fact.

But take my word for it, baby—*I can.*

One little mistake . . .

I was running, faster than I had ever run in my life, and as I ran those words kept ringing through my head, louder than the pounding of my heart or the breath rasping in my throat: *one little mistake . . .* that was what the losers always said, the *goniffs* stupid enough to get *caught,* that was what they'd whine as the handcuffs closed over their wrists and the Boys in Blue dragged them away . . . *it's not fair, just one little mistake . . . it's not* fair . . . But I wasn't a loser, I was tough and smart, I wasn't like *them . . .*

One little mistake . . .

I was running through the warehouse district and the cops were right behind me, and not all that far behind me either, in *hot pursuit* as they say on TV, following the trail of blood I was laying down drop by drop. I could hear the footsteps clattering in staccato nonrhythm back there, harbingers of more *hot pursuit* to come. And they were going to catch me this time. This time they were going to get me—the certainty of that sat in a cold lump in my stomach, and made my legs feel cold and slow, so slow. I'd made my one little mistake, and now I was going to pay for it; boy, was I going to pay, my whole *life* was going down the toilet and *it wasn't fair . . .*

I choked back a laugh that sounded more like a sob.

Behind me, the footsteps were abruptly halved. Tiny hairs crackled on the nape of my neck. I knew without looking that one of the cops was falling into the regulation crouch while his buddy ran far and to the side. Now he would be holding his gun two-handed and leveling it at me. I tried to zig-zag, do some broken-field running, but let's face it, fear drives you *forward,* not to the side. Maybe my path wobbled a bit; you couldn't really call it evasive action.

I *felt* the bullet sizzle by, inches from my head, an instantaneous fraction of a second before I heard it. The time lag would have been subliminal

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to anyone who wasn't hyper on adrenaline and fear. There was a *ping* as the bullet ricochetted off a brick wall far down the street, and I went into panic mode, pure scrambling terror. Otherwise I'd have known better than to duck into a side alley without checking for exits first.

It was a cul-de-sac.

Belgian block paving stone, a few ripe heaps of garbage, a rusted automobile muffler or three. And dead ahead, the blank back wall of a warehouse. No doors, no windows, no exits.

I skidded to a stop, and gaped idiotically.

What now, wiseass?

The cops rounded the corner behind me.

Galvanized, like a corpse jolted into motion by electrodes, I started running again, blindly, straight at the wall.

There was no place to *go* . . .

An hour before, I had been trying to sell four kilos of lactose for a hundred thousand dollars. Listen—I had a hell of a nut. My overhead included rent and furnishings for the Big Store (actually the second floor of an old warehouse converted into a loft apartment), a thousand each for the shills, ten percent of the take for the manager, and thirty-five percent for the roper. These things add up.

Stringy—the mark—was a joy to burn, though. He was a pimp and I never *have* liked those suckers. Cheap and lazy grifters, the batch of them.

"It's been stepped on *once*," I said. "Very lightly. And that's only because I prefer it that way. Know what I mean?"

Stringy nodded sagely. The roper, James Whittcombe Harris—better known in some circles as Jimmy the Wit—grinned a trifle too eagerly. In the background half a dozen post-hippie types wandered about, putting Grateful Dead albums on the sound system, rolling joints, discussing the Cosmic All, and doing all those beautiful things that made the sixties die so hard. "I know what you mean, Brother Man," Stringy said meaningfully. Jimmy the Wit snickered in anticipation.

"Jerry's got the best stuff on the Coast," Jimmy the Wit said. "He smuggles it in himself."

"That so?"

I smiled modestly. "I had help. But I'll admit to being pleased with this particular scam. We set up a front office—religious wholesalers—with calling cards, stationery, the whole riff. And we brought the load in inside of a batch of wooden madonnas. You should have seen the things! The absolute, and I mean *ne plus ultra* worst examples of native folk art these tired old eyes have ever seen. The cheeks were painted orange." I shuddered theatrically.

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"When we uncrated the things—man, you should've been there. We *took a hatchet and split them up the crotch, and all this wonderful white* powder tumbled out of the stomachs."

We shared appreciative laughter. Somewhere in the background, a shill put on the *Sergeant Pepper* album. Somebody else lit a stick of patchouli incense.

Sheila chose that moment to send up the steerer. Good timing is what makes a manager, and Sheila was the best. The steerer was a blue jeans and Pink Floyd teeshirt type. He tapped me on the shoulder, said, "Hey Jerry, I'm cutting out now."

"Yeah, well. That's cool, man." I threw Stringy a raised eyebrow, a sort of lookit-the-jerks-I-gotta-put-up-with look. Easing him carefully onto my side. Blue Jeans shifted uncomfortably.

"Uh. You promised to deal me a couple a keys."

"Oh. Right." I called over my shoulder, "Hey, Sheila, honey, bring me the basket, willya?" Then I looked at the steerer as if he were something unpleasant. "That's sixty gee," I said doubtfully.

"Got it right here." He pulled out a wad of money that was eye-popping if you didn't know that all the middle bills were ones. I negligently accepted it, and traded it to Sheila for a large Andean wicker hamper she fetched from the dark recesses of the loft.

If Sheila had no talent at all, I'd still stick her in the background during a play. She stands six-three and weighs about half what you'd swear was humanly possible. She always, even indoors at midnight, wears sunglasses. Creepy. Most people make her out to be a junkie.

"Thanks, sweet." I stuck the top of the hamper under my arm. "Count the money and put it somewhere, willya?" She riffled through it, said, "Sixty," in a startlingly deep voice and faded back into obscurity.

I rummaged through the hamper, came up with two brown bags. Then I weighed them judiciously, one in each hand, and dropped one back in. The other I opened to reveal a zip-lock plastic bag crammed to the gills with white powder.

"You want a taste?" My voice said he didn't.

"Naw, I'm on the air in an hour. No time to get wasted."

"Ciao, then." Meaning: Get lost.

"Ciao."

The steerer left, taking his midnight-doper pallor with him. I was playing Stringy against a roomful of *very pale* honkies. The only dark face in the joint was his. Which helped put him on the defensive, raised the fear of appearing to be . . . *not cool* . . . in front of *all these white folk.*

At the same time, I was busily snubbing them *all*, and yet being very warm toward him. Treating him as a fellow sophisticate. Getting him to *identify* with me. It helps create trust.

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"Hey, I like your basket, man."

"Yeah?" My voice was pleased. "I got it in S.A. Be going back there as soon as I unload the last—" I glanced in the basket "—*eight* keys. If you like, I could mail you a couple."

"You do that. How much'd you say they cost?"

"Empty or full?" We all three laughed at this. "No, seriously, I'd be glad to. No charge."

Stringy was pleased. "What can I say? I like your *style*, too."

"Hey, man," Jimmy interjected. "How about that *blow*, huh? I got me plans for a very heav-ee date!" Nobody laughed.

"Sure, sure," I said distastefully. He scrabbled inside his pockets for his wad. "No hurry," I said. He thrust it at my face, and I let it fall into my lap.

"Fifty thousand," he said. "That's two keys for me, 'cause I'm going in with my brother here."

Jimmy the Wit can be a very likeable guy. And when Stringy met him, that's what he was. But once the mark has been roped in, a major part of the roper's job is transferring the mark's respect from himself to the insideman. He quietly makes himself unpleasant, and fosters the feeling in the mark that the roper is not really *deserving* of the great deal that is going down. Not at all a cool person like the insideman. So the mark's loyalties shift. Then, when the blow-off comes, the moment in which the mark is separated from his money and from the insideman, the mark has no desire whatever to stay in the presence of the roper. There is a clean, quiet parting of the ways.

I looked down at the money, picked it up, let it drop. "I really shouldn't be doing this," I said sadly. "I half-promised a friend that I'd hold out six keys for him."

Jimmy the Wit looked stricken. Stringy didn't say anything, but his face got very still, and there was a hungry look in his eyes.

Figure it this way: Coke sells for maybe a hundred dollars a gram. At that rate, Stringy's four keys would be worth four hundred thousand dollars at what the police call "street prices." Now admittedly Stringy is not going to be selling his coke in four thousand single-gram transactions, so he's not going to get anywhere near that much for it. Still, I've strongly implied that the stuff is at least eighty percent pure. Which means that he can step on it lightly and get another key. Or he can step on it *heavy* and practically double the weight. Which he was likely to do, since his customers were all inner-city and doubtless had never had pure *anything* in their lives. There's profit in the business, never doubt it.

"Hey, look, man," Jimmy whined. "You *promised.*"

"I didn't say I wouldn't do it," I said, annoyed. "It's just—" I called over my shoulder, "Hey, Sheila!" She materialized by my side.

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"Yes?" she said in that unsettlingly deep voice.

"How long do you think it'll take Deke to come up with the money?"

"Two weeks."

"That long?" I asked.

"Easily." She paused, then added, "You know how he is."

I sighed, and dismissed her with a wave of my hand. Thought for a moment. "What the hell. I'll give him a good deal on the next batch."

Everyone relaxed. Stringy let out a deep breath, the first real indication he'd given as to how deeply hooked he was. Smiles all around.

I sorted through the hamper, carefully choosing six bags, and laying them on the coffee table we were seated around. They made an impressive pile.

I took up a coke mirror from the edge of the table, and wiped it clean against my sleeve. Popping open a bag at random, I spooned out a small mound of lactose. Enough for three generous snorts. Following which, I began chopping it up with a gold-plated razor blade. Ritual is very important in these matters. Stringy and Jimmy the Wit were hanging *onto my every move.*

"Hey." I paused midway through the chopping. "I've got an idea." I put the blade down and reached for a small box. "As long as we're doing this, I want you guys to sample something. It's kind of special." I looked at Stringy as I said this, implying that the offer was really—secretly—for him.

I opened the box and carefully lifted out the Rock.

Stringy's eyes grew large and liquid, as I lifted the Rock up before me, holding it as though it were the Eucharist.

He was staring at a single crystal of cocaine, net weight over one full ounce. It's an extremely rare and valuable commodity. Not for the price it would bring (two thousand dollars "street prices"), but for the status. I paid dearly for that crystal; a *lot* more than two thousand. But the effect was worth it. Stringy positively lusted after it. He was hooked.

Gingerly, delicately, I shaved three more lines from the Rock, and set it back in its box. I resumed chopping, keeping the mound of lactose and the mound of coke carefully separate. "Some jerk offered me twenty thousand for this the other day," I said. "I told him to go fuck himself. He had no appreciation of the beauty of it. This is pure magic, friends. And you can't buy magic, you know what I mean?"

Stringy nodded in a worldly fashion. I finished chopping, and began to lay out the lines with wide sweeps of the razorblade. I'd separate the mounds into three lines each, then merge two and divide them again. I shifted minute quantities back and forth, evening up the amounts. My hand flew gracefully over the mirror, shifting the lines to and fro like a circus grifter shuffling walnut shells under one of which resides a small

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green pea. Pretty soon you had to be paying very close attention to know which line came from which mound.

Sheila's voice broke in suddenly. "Mind if I borrow the Rock?" I grunted assent without looking up. She faded back into the gloom, taking box and Rock with her. Stringy swiveled to watch it go. He'd have been less than human if he hadn't.

I took advantage of his distraction to shift two or three of the lines. After a bit more fussing, I presented the mirror. On it were two groups of three lines each.

"There," I said. "This—" I tapped the razorblade next to the first group "—is from the stuff you're buying. And this—" tapping next to the second group "—is from the Rock. I suggest you try the merchandise first, so that you can judge it without synergistic effects." Everyone seemed amenable to the notion.

I looked down at the money Jimmy the Wit had dumped in my lap. "Damn, Jimmy, these are all old bills. Either of you guys got—"

Stringy pulled out a leather bill-holder from inside his jacket, and suavely slid out a single, crisp and spotless thousand-dollar bill from what was obviously a matched set of one hundred. My expression communicated approval, and he happily rolled it into a snorter.

I held the mirror up to Stringy, and with a gracious smile he did up the first line, half in one nostril and half in the other. Jimmy the Wit was all impatience, and as soon as Stringy had half-shut his eyes and leaned back his head in appreciation, Jimmy snatched the rolled-up bill from his hands. He leaned far forward and did up his line in a single snort. I followed suit. Then all three of us let out small laughs of appreciation.

"Ve-ry niiiiice!" Stringy said. "In fact—" he handed the leather billfold with its hundred-grand cargo to me with a flourish "—I'd go so far as to say 'Keep the billfold.' "

"Sheila," I said quietly. She was there. I handed her Jimmy's wad and Stringy's money. She riffled through Jimmy's first.

"Fifty," she said. Then she riffled through Stringy's money, every bit as quickly, but with a great deal more care.

"Ninety-nine." She faded far back. To the kitchen, in fact, where there was a switch to a signal light in the next building.

"Well," I said. "That was pleasant." I was playing with the empty billfold, admiring it absently. "What say we do up the rest?" No argument.

Of course, Jimmy and I had snorted up lactose while Stringy was inhaling pure Peruvian toot. When I juggled the lines, I laid out the blow in the first, fourth, and sixth places. Which meant that Stringy, being first to sample each group, snorted up powder from the Rock. It also

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meant that the last line—ostensibly for me—was also real coke. And there's where I made my one little mistake.

The play as written was that in handling the mirror I would bumble and spill the last line all across the rug. What *happened* was that I got greedy. Coke'll do that to you.

I did up the line.

It was just as the rush was hitting me that Sheila's signal was answered. There was a vicious pounding on the door, and then a *crash* as the whole damn thing came splintering off its hinges. Men in blue uniforms, carrying guns, spilled into the room. "Awright, nobody move!" one of them yelled.

I was riding on a great wave of clean energy when it happened, and it threw off my timing. I lurched forward a split-second late, and then everything happened at once.

Stringy jumped to his feet, looking wildly for an exit.

I fell across the coffee table, scattering bags of white powder with gleeful abandon.

One of the shills screamed. Another shouted, "Let's get OUTTA here!" *Blue Jay Way* was playing in the background.

Clouds of white rose from the table as zip-lock bags burst open. There was a gunshot.

Jimmy the Wit grabbed Stringy by the arm and pointed toward a rear window, which led to a fire escape.

The shills ran about frantically.

And Sheila turned the lights out, plunging the room into darkness.

For the next three minutes, we all acted out our parts. Then, when she was certain that Jimmy the Wit had led Stringy safely out of the neighborhood, Sheila turned the lights on again.

Everyone stopped what they were doing. The "police" holstered their guns. The shills straightened up their clothes. And I swiped at the lactose powder on my knees.

Then they all lined up to get paid.

"Good show," I told Sheila, as we left. "Damned good."

"Yeah. Drop you someplace?"

"Naw. I feel like taking a stroll."

When she was gone, I murmured "Damned good" to myself again, and started walking. I was feeling fine. There was a time when they said there were only three Big Cons: The Wire, the Rag, and the Pay-off. The Rock was my own invention, and I was extremely pleased with how well it was working out.

So I strolled along, whistling, following the path I knew Jimmy the Wit would lead the pimp along. This was the final part of my job, to make sure the button hadn't come hot, that the roper had gotten away

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from the mark clean, and without attracting any attention from the police. But it was pure routine, for I knew, deep in my bones that the button hadn't come hot. I could feel it.

So I was stunned when I rounded a corner and saw Jimmy the Wit and Stringy in the arms of the Law. There were five cops around a stricken-looking Jimmy and an extremely pissed Stringy.

That's when I realized what a mistake it had been to do up that single, innocuous line of coke. Because Stringy was looking mad because the cops were *laughing* at him. After all, he was holding a hundred-gee bagful of what they had just spot-analyzed as milk sugar.

I realized all in a flash that I was in big trouble. A fraction of a second too late in scattering the bags. Stringy had been able to shove one of them under his arm before fleeing. If I'd been on cue, when the cops nabbed him for suspicious running—which *is* a crime in some of our larger metropoli—we'd have *still* gotten away clean. He'd have never realized that he'd been burned.

Even at that, if Jimmy the Wit had been looking my way when I rounded the corner, he'd have managed to distract Stringy while I eased out of sight. But there's just no arguing with a losing streak. Stringy lashed an indignant finger at me and yelled, "There he is! He's the burn artist that ripped me off!"

I bolted. Behind me, one of the police yelled, "Stop or I'll shoot!" and there was the sharp sound of a bullet hitting the edge of the building inches to my side. A fragment of brick went flying, and cut an evil gash in my upper arm. The pain struck me with all the force of a fist in the ribs.

I stumbled and fell to my knees, recovered, stood, and ran.

The cops ran after me.

They chased me through the warehouse district and into a cul-de-sac.

No place to *go*—

The smooth wall of the warehouse loomed up in front of me, and it might just as well have been Mount Everest.

Dead end, you dumb schmuck, I shrieked silently at myself, *dead end!* My mind gave up at that point, but my legs had developed a will of their own; they wanted to run, so run they did—I imagined them whirring around in huge blurred circles like the legs of cartoon characters, biting into the dirt, sending me sizzling forward like a rocket. *Feets, don't fail me now!*

I hurtled toward the wall. Even if I'd wanted to, I couldn't have stopped in time.

Behind me, I could hear an ominous double click as one of the cops cocked his gun for another shot.

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Some distanced part of my mind made me put my hands up in front of me at the last moment to absorb some of the impact.

There was no impact.

I went right through the wall.

There was no impact, but there *was* sudden darkness. The world disappeared. I think I screamed. For a moment or two all was madness and confusion, and then, without having broken stride, I began to lose momentum, my running steps coming slower and slower, as though I were in a film that was being shifted into slow motion, as though I were trying to run through molasses. The resistance I was moving against increased, and just at the point where all my forward momentum had been spilled and I was slooooowing to a stop, there was a slight tugging sensation, like a soap bubble popping, light burst upon me, and I could see again.

I was standing in a room.

Someone's living room, it looked like—an antiquarian's perhaps, a man of quiet tastes and substantial means. There was a Bokhara carpet in scarlet and brown. A large, glassed-in bookcase filled with thick and dusty leather-bound volumes. A browning world-globe on a gleaming brass stand. A highboy with decanters and cut-glass goblets arranged on it. In the middle of everything, about ten feet away from me, was a massive mahogany desk, obviously an antique, with charts carelessly scattered across it and, behind the desk, a tall-backed overstuffed chair—of the type you see in movies that take place in British clubs—with someone sitting in it.

The walls and ceiling of the room were featureless and gray, although it was hard to tell what they were made of—they seemed *oily* somehow, as if there was a faint film over them that would occasionally, almost subliminally, shimmer. There were no doors or windows that I could see. The quickest of head-turns told me that another blank wall was only a step or two behind me. There was no sign of or sound from the police, who should also have been only a step or two behind me.

I thought my disorientation was complete until I took a closer look at the man in the chair and saw that it was Stringy.

"Jerry, my man!" Stringy said jovially. "You have been a *baaad* boy." He smiled at me over a brandy snifter half-filled with some amber colored fluid.

For the first time in my life, I was at a loss for words.

I opened my mouth, closed it again, like a fish breathing water. My thoughts scurried in a dozen different directions at once. The first thought was that I was dead or in a coma—one of those goddamn cops had shot me, blown me away, and somewhere back there—wherever "there" was; wherever *here* was—I was lying dead or dying in the street, crazed

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thoughts whirling through my cooling mind like the goosed scurryings of autumn leaves in the wind. Or, less dramatically, I had somehow hallucinated everything that had happened since snorting up that fateful line of coke. *The little boy fell out of bed and woke up. It had all been a dream!*

Screw that. A con man doesn't last long once he starts conning himself; an ability to face reality is *de rigeur* in this trade. I could feel the sweat cooling under my arms, could smell the sour reek of my own fear. The bullet graze on my upper arm throbbed. I had a *bitch* of a headache. No, whatever was happening—it was real.

I didn't like the way Stringy was looking at me.

"You burned me, Jerry," he said. "Jerry—you shouldn't have burned me." He sounded regretful, almost wistful.

Then, slowly, he smiled.

"Hey, man," I said, licking at my lips. "I didn't—I don't know what's—"

"Oh, cut it out," Stringy said impatiently. "Don't bother working your way through 'Injured Innocence,' tape 5-A. You burned me, and I *know* you burned me, and you are going to pay for it, never doubt it." He smiled his glacial sliver of a smile again, thin enough to slice bread, and for the first time in years I began to regret that it wasn't my style to carry a piece. Was *Stringy* packing a gun or a knife? Macho Man is not my style either (I'll run, given a choice), but the thought flickered through my mind that I'd better jump him quick, before he pulled some kind of weapon; even if I couldn't overpower him, maybe I could go over or around or through him and find some way *out* of here—

I spread my hands wide in a weakly conciliatory gesture, at the same time kicking out with my legs and hurling myself at Stringy, thinking *punch him in the throat, people don't expect that . . .*

Stringy touched something on the desktop, almost negligently, and I stopped.

I just *stopped,* like a fly trapped in amber.

If I'd needed something to confirm that something very weird was going down here, that would have been plenty.

My body was no longer obeying me from the neck down but, oddly, I felt my nerves steady and my panic fade—there are times when things get so bad that it seems you've got little left to lose, and *that* is the time, as all high rollers know, to put your whole bankroll down and pick up those dice and go for broke.

"You've made your point, Stringy," I said in a calm, considering voice. Then I smiled. "*Okay*, then," I said brightly. "Let's talk!"

Stringy stared at me poker-faced for a couple of beats, and then he snorted derisively, and then he laughed. "You know, Jerry," he said, "you're really pretty good."

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"Thanks," I said dryly.

"You had *me* fooled, you know," Stringy said, smiling. "And I don't fool easily. I really thought that you were going to come across with all that great snow, I really did. And that setup! Your staging and your timing were superb, you know, quite first-rate, really. You had me going in just the direction you wanted me to go, steered neatly right down the chute. If I hadn't managed to pick up that bag in the confusion, I'd never have known that you were burning me—I would have just shrugged my shoulders and chalked it all up to fate, to the influence of some evil star. I really would have. You are a very subtle man, Jerry."

He was still wearing his Superfly pimpsuit, but his voice had changed; it was cultured now, urbane, almost an octave higher, and although he still employed the occasional smattering of street slang, whatever the unfamiliar accent behind his words *was*, it certainly *wasn't* Pore Black Child from Lenox and 131st. Even his skin was different now; there were coppery highlights I'd never seen before, as if he were some refinement of racial type that simply *did not exist*. I was beginning to realize that whoever—or whatever—else Stringy was, he was also a bit of a con man himself.

"You're an alien, aren't you?" I asked suddenly. "From a flying saucer, right? Galactic Federation? The whole bit?" And with any luck a Prime Directive—don't hurt the poor backward natives. Please God?

He curled his lip in scorn. "Shit no."

"What *are* you, then?"

He propped his feet up on the desk, leaned back, put his hands behind his head. "Time-traveler."

I gaped at him. "You're . . . a *time-traveler?*"

"Got it in one, sport," he said languidly.

"If you're a time-traveler—*then why the hell were you trying to score cocaine from me?*"

"Why not?" he said. He had closed his eyes.

"*Why,* for bleeding Christ's sake?"

He opened his eyes. "Well, *I* don't know what you do with *yours*, but what I do with *mine* is to stick it right up my nose and snuffle it *up*, snuffleuffle*upagus*, until it's all gone. Yum. Gives you a hell of a nice rush. Helps pass the time while you're on your way to the Paleolithic, or *whenever*. Makes a long boring trip through the eons just *fly* by. Other time-travelers may be into speed or reds or synapse-snappers or floaters, but among the elite of the Time Corps, such as myself, coke is *the* drug of choice, no others need *apply* . . ."

"That's not what I meant, damnit! Why come to *me* for it, why go to all that trouble, sneaking around in back alleys, spending all that money? If you can really travel in time, why not just go back to, say, pre-Conquest

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Peru, and gather up a sackful for *nothing?* Or if that's too much trouble, why not just go back to the turn of the century when it was still legal and buy all you want, with nobody giving a damn? Or . . ."

Stringy aimed a finger at me like a gun, and made a shooting motion, and I'm ashamed to admit that I flinched—who knew what he could or couldn't do with that finger? Nothing happened, though, except that he made a pow! noise with his lips, and then said, "Right on! You've put your finger right on the veritable *crux* of the problem, sport. Why not indeed?" He winked, laced his hands behind his head again. "The *problem,* my old, is that the authorities are almost as stuffy in *my* time as they were in *yours,* in spite of all the years gone by. Particularly the Powers That Be in the Time Corps, my bosses—they want us to flit soberly through the centuries on our appointed rounds, primly protecting the One and Proper Chain of Events and fighting off paradoxes. They do *not* want us, while we're engaged in protecting and preserving Order by, say, keeping the bad guys from helping the Persians to win at Marathon, they do *not* want us, at that particular moment, to go sneaking off behind some scrubby Grecian bush and blow our brains right out of the top of our skulls with a big snootful of toot. They frown on that. They are, as I say, stuffy."

He stretched, and ran his fingers back through his afro. "To forestall your next question: no, of course my bosses can't watch all of time and space, but they don't *have* to—they *can* watch the monitors in the control complex that show where and when our timecraft are going. So if we're supposed to be in, say, 1956 Iowa, and we stop off in pre-Conquest Peru instead to grab us a sackful of crystal, why, that'll show up on the *monitors,* right, and we're in big trouble. No, what's been happening instead is that we've been doing a lot of work the last few subjective years more or less in this location and in this part of the century, and it's *so* much easier, when we're scheduled to be in 1982 Philadelphia or whenever *anyway*—when our car is already parked, so to speak, and the monitors off—to just whomp up some money, whatever amount is necessary, and take a few minutes off and go hunt up a native source. To take our bucket to the well, so to speak."

"I see," I said weakly.

"Except," Stringy said, sitting up slowly and deliberately and putting his feet back on the ground and his hands flat on the desk in front of him, "*except,* Jerry, what do you think happened? We went to the well with our bucket this time, and the well was *dry,* Jerry." That flat, evil light was back in his eyes again. "No snow in our forecast, Jerry old bean. And do you know *why?* Because you *burned* us, Jerry . . ."

"If you can do all that stuff," I said, fighting to control the fear that wanted my voice to break and whine, "why don't you just go back to the

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start of all this and find yourself another source. Just never come to see me in the first place." *Why me, Lord? Let this cup pass from me . . .*

Stringy shook his head. "Might create a paradox-loop, and that'd show up on the monitors. I came close *enough* to looping when I shook off the fuzz and came angling back to snatch you way from the long arm of the Law. Although—" he smiled thinly—"I would've loved to have seen the faces of those cops when you ran right through that brick wall; that's one police report that'll never get filed."

"Then why don't you let me take the money and go out and *buy* you some real coke?"

He shook his head again, that ominous glint in his eyes. "It's not the money—that's just paper. It's not even getting the coke anymore. It's the *principle* of the thing."

If I'd been a bit nearer, I'd have spit in his eye. "Why you dumb ersatz pimp!" I snarled, losing the ragged edge of my temper. "You're a terrific one to be talking about *prinicples. You paid for the whole transaction in funny money.* You stiffed *me.*"

He shrugged. "Your people never would've noticed anything odd about that money. But that doesn't matter anyway. What *matters* is—*you don't fuck around with the Time Corps.* Never, ever, not even when the only mission we're on is a clandestine dope run. You've screwed over the Time Corps, and we're going to take it out of your hide, I promise you." He smiled that thin and icy smile again, and it cut like a razor. "We'll get that one hundred thousand dollars worth of use out of you, Jerry—*one way or another.*"

I tried to keep my face still, but a hundred dreadful images were skittering behind my eyes, and he probably knew it: me as a galley slave, tied to a giant oar while the salt sea spray stings the festering whip-scars on my back; me as a mine slave, working deep underground, never seeing the sun, lungs straining at the foul air, my back gnarled, my hands torn and bleeding; me as a medieval serf, struggling to pull a primitive plow through the unturned soil, sweating and groaning like a mule; me being disemboweled, crucified, having my eyes put out, having molten gold poured down my throat . . . No doubt a race of time-travelers could arrange for any of those fates—history is large enough to swallow thousands of wretches like me down into nameless oblivion, and no doubt it had. Was Judge Crater now a kitchen slave in ancient Carthage? Did Ambrose Bierce now spend his time shoveling out manure piles in some barnyard in Celtic Britain?

We'll get one hundred thousand dollars worth of use out of you—*one way or another.*

Think, damnit, *think.* Let's see the Giant Brain get you out of *this* one, kid.

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My mind raced like a car engine does when someone has the accelerator and the brake simultaneously floored.

I stared unflinchingly into Stringy's ice-pale eyes for one heartbeat, two heartbeats, three, and then slowly, oh so slowly, I allowed a smile to form on my face, a beatific smile, a knowing smile, a smile that I managed to make both mocking and conspiratorial all at the same time.

"Tell me, Stringy," I said lazily, "do you ever *meddle* with the One and Proper Chain of Events instead of just preserving the *status quo?* Do you ever *tinker* with it, just a little bit, here and there, now and then. Do you ever beat the bad guys to the punch by changing something *first*?"

"Well . . ." Stringy said. He looked uneasy.

"You know something, Stringy?" I said, still in that same dreamy, drifting, conversational tone. "I'm one of the few guys in the world who can pull off the Big Con—can't be more than five or six others who can handle it, and I'm the best of them. There can't *ever* have been many, not in any age. And I took you with it, Stringy—you know that I did. I took you with it clean. And you know just as well as I do that if it hadn't been for an Act of God, a million-to-one accident, you never even would have tumbled to the fact that I took you."

"Well . . ." Stringy said. "Maybe so . . ."

I felt a rush of fierce singing joy and carefully hid it. I was going to do it! I was going to *con* the sonofabitch. I was going to take him! With the odds stacked overwhelmingly in his favor, still I was going to take him!

I metaphorically rolled up my sleeves and settled down to *talk* better and faster than I had ever talked before.

Now, years later by my own subjective life clock, I sometimes wonder just who was conning whom. I think that Stringy—not actually his name, of course; but then, neither is my name Jerry—was playing me like a virtuoso angler with a record trout on the line from the moment I came stumbling through the timescreen, playing on my fear and anger and disorientation, letting me run up against black despair and then see just the faintest glimmer of hope beyond, conning me into thinking I was conning him into letting me do what he'd wanted me to do all along: or, at any rate, as soon as he had realized what sort of man I was.

Good recruits for the more exotic branches of the Time Corps are hard to come by in any age, just as I'd said, and Stringy was—and is—a very subtle fellow indeed. I always enjoy working with him, and one of the fringe benefits—for Stringy's taste for snow was real enough—is the plenitude of high-quality dope he always manages to gather unto himself.

Ironically, my specialty within the Corps has become the directing of operations where the button is *supposed* to come hot, where the marks

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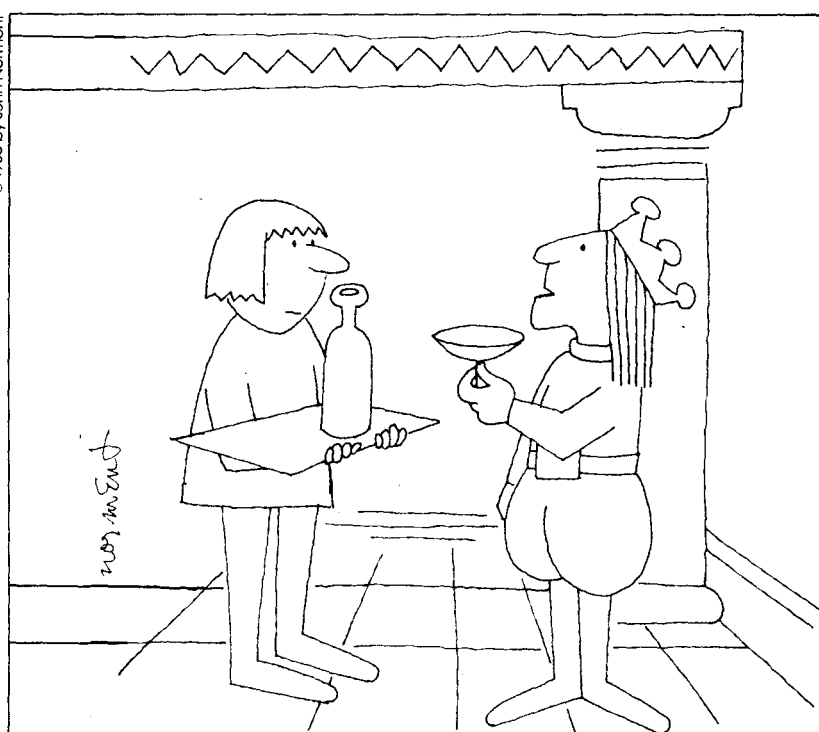
are *supposed* to realize that they are being conned; their resultant fury, if adroitly directed toward the proper target, can have some very interesting effects indeed.

As with the South Sea Bubble scandal, for instance, which brought Walpole—no friend of Bolingbroke's—into power, as a minor result of which—one of many, many results which echoed down the timelines for centuries—a certain motion picture starring Errol Flynn was never made, or even contemplated. Or with the Teapot Dome scandal, as a result of which—a small result among many more significant and long-term results—Harding's name is not attached to a certain dam in Colorado, and never has been.

My latest operation is something that will come to be called Watergate. You haven't heard of it yet—you *couldn't* have heard of it yet.

But just give it time—you will. ●



"I've been Prince Charming, and I've been Mr. Toad, and believe me, both incarnations have been fraught with interest."

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by John M. Ford

SCRABBLE WITH GOD

Playing board games with an omnipotent opponent isn't easy. . . . As the character says, "If you challenge God and you're wrong, you lose the point and get turned into a pillar of salt."

art: Arthur George

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I don't recommend playing with God. It isn't that He cheats, exactly. But the other night we were in the middle of a game, I was about thirty points up, and He emptied out his rack. ZWEEGHB. Double word score and the 50-point bonus.

"Zweeghb?" I said.

"Is that a challenge?"

"Well . . ." If you challenge God and you're wrong, you lose the points and get turned into a pillar of salt.

"Look outside," He said. So I did. Sure enough, there was a zweeghb out there, eating the rosebushes, like Thurber's unicorn.

"I thought you rested from creating stuff."

"Eighth day, I did. Now I'm fresh as a daisy. You going to pass or play?"

"I'll play." I made OXYGEN, and got a triple word score. He made a grumbling noise. Outside, a cloud blotted out the sun, and the zweeghb looked up nervously.

. "It's *oxygen.*" I said. "It's all around us."

He said, "You sure about that?"

I took a couple of deep breaths, just in case. (You think I'm kidding, right? Do you remember when the sky was dark with skazlorls? Double word score, fifty-point bonus, phffft. And then He *challenged* me on it.)

He drummed his fingers on the table, unleashing a rain of frogs in New Rochelle, and played UZZIAH. There were already three Zs on the board, but you learn not to notice that.

"That's a proper name," I said. "Normally capitalized."

"Not after he put his hands on the Ark of the Covenant," He said, but took it back. Outside, the zweeghb was devoured by locusts.

Satan came in from the kitchen then, with a bowl of pretzels and three beers. "We're out of barbecue potato chips," he said.

God said, "There's plenty of loaves and fishes. And some bridge mix."

"Any Me Dogs?"

"No, no You Dogs," God said, annoyed. "No Your Food cake, either. Come in here and play." (He told me once, "Angel Food, Deviled Ham, Demon Rum—*everybody* has snacks but me. Didn't I start the whole thing, with the manna bit? Next time My people are in the wilderness, they're gonna get sushi, and *like* it.")

Satan said, "How's the game going?" though of course the fink knew already. It's why he was out in the kitchen, eating all the barbecued potato chips. "You want to play poker?"

We both said no. They don't call it His Picture-Book for nothing.

Finally I got out the Monopoly set and we played that. God likes the battleship piece, and Satan insists on the top hat, so I took the racing car. Monopoly usually goes pretty well, even with these guys. Satan

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always tries to build casinos on the Boardwalk, and the Electric Company had a meltdown, but nobody suddenly came up with a $20,000 bill, or anything like that. I think it's something to do with rendering unto Caesar. I got hotels on the cheap purple properties early, and sure enough, Satan hit the one on Baltic Avenue. He offered me Helen of Troy to forget the rent, but I held out and bankrupted him.

I mean, friends are friends, but winning is winning. And besides, he never brings the beer.

That left me and Him, and we were both pretty well set up; we could have gone on all night. Then I landed on Community Chest, and the card said A GREAT FLOOD COVERS VENTNOR AVENUE. "Aw, come on," I said, "you promised, never again."

"Yeah, I guess so," He said, and we called it a draw.

It was getting late. God was going back to his place on Grammercy Park, and offered Satan a lift.

"If I owned Hell and the Lower East Side," Satan said, "I'd live in Hell and rent out the East Side."

"I'm not sure you don't already," God said, and said to me "I've told you never to sign a contract with this character?"

I could hear them arguing all the way down the stairs. When I turned away from the door, I had company again. His black cloak was draped over a chair and his scythe was propped up in the corner, and his dead-pale face was lit green by the monitor on my Apple II.

It plays better chess than I do anyway. I put the last of the pretzels by his bony elbow and went to bed. ●

ONE WISH!?

For MAGIC RUGS that will fly us
ALL the way into those Terminals
of the Cities called STARTING OVER—
and the Countries named RIGHT-THIS-TIME!

—David R. Bunch

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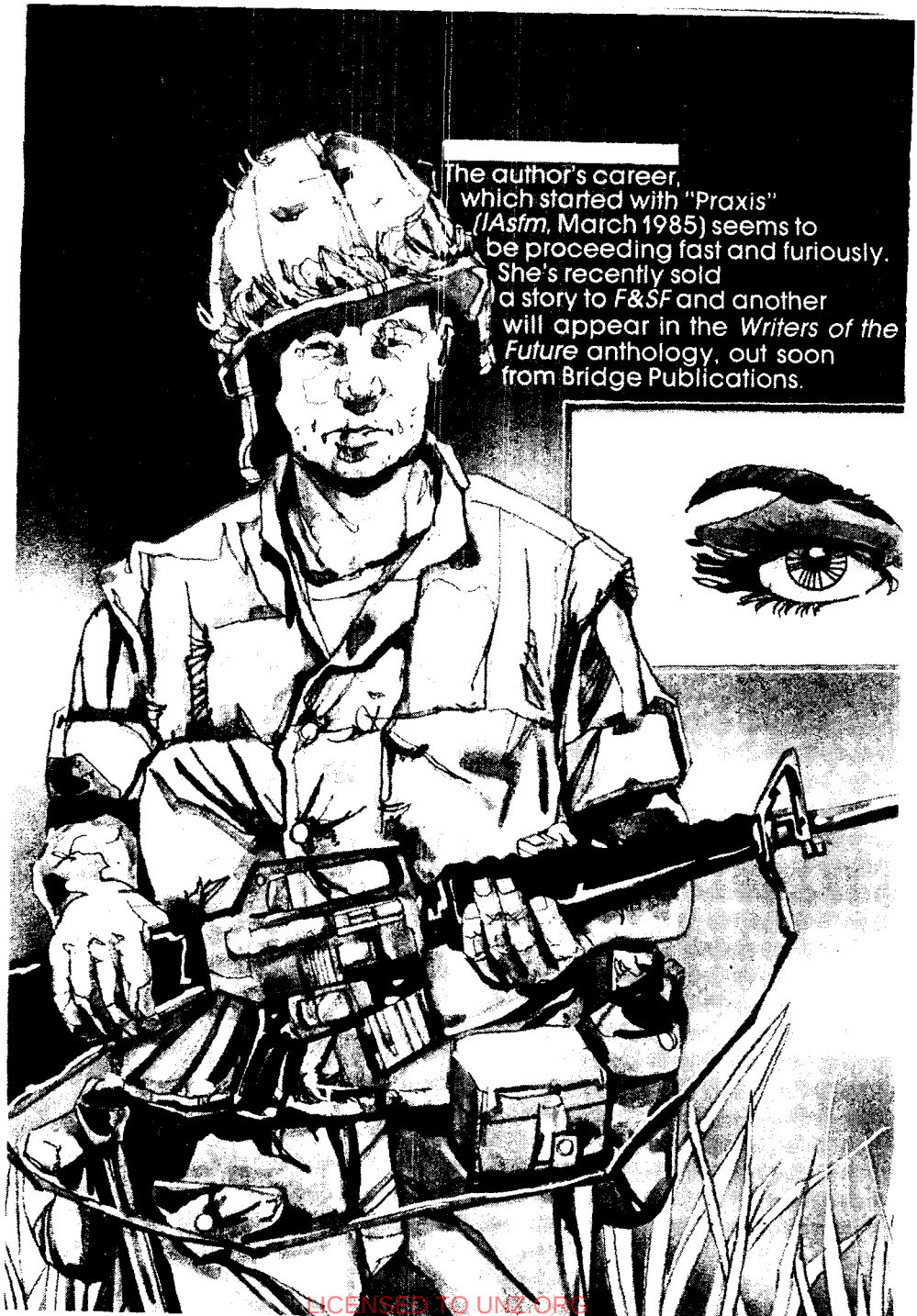
The author's career, which started with "Praxis" (IAsfm, March 1985) seems to be proceeding fast and furiously. She's recently sold a story to F&SF and another will appear in the Writers of the Future anthology, out soon from Bridge Publications.

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by Karen Joy Fowler

THE LAKE WAS FULL OF ARTIFICIAL THINGS

(title from Wallace Stevens)

art: Arthur George

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Daniel was older than Miranda had expected. In 1970, when they had said good-bye, he had been twenty-two. Two years later he was dead, but now, approaching her with the bouncing walk which had suited his personality so well, he appeared as a middle-aged man and quite gray, though solid and muscular. She noted with relief that he was smiling. "Randy!" he said. He laughed delightedly. "You look wonderful."

Miranda glanced down at herself, wondering what, in fact, she did look like or if she had any form at all. She saw the flesh of her arms firm again and the skin smooth and tight. So *she* was the twenty-year old. Isn't that odd, she thought, turning her hands palms up to examine them. Then Daniel reached her. The sun was bright in the sky behind him, obscuring his face, giving him a halo. He put his arms around her. I feel him, she thought in astonishment. I smell him. She breathed in slowly. "Hello, Daniel," she said.

He squeezed her slightly, then dropped his arms and looked around. Miranda looked outward, too. They were on the college campus. Surely this was not the setting she would have chosen. It unsettled her, as if she had been sent backward in time and gifted with prescience, but remained powerless to make any changes, was doomed to see it all again, moving to its inevitable conclusion. Daniel, however, seemed pleased.

He pointed off to the right. "There's the creek," he said, and suddenly she could hear it. "Memories there, right?" and she remembered lying beneath him on the grass by the water. She put her hands on his shoulders now; his clothes were rough against her palms and military—like his hair. He gestured to the round brick building behind her. "Tollman Hall," he said. "Am I right? God, this is great, Randy. I remember *everything*. Total recall. I had Physics 10 there with Dr. Fielding. Physics for non-majors. I couldn't manage my vectors and I got a B." He laughed again, throwing an arm around Miranda. "It's great to be back."

They began to walk together toward the center of campus, slow walking with no destination, designed for conversation. They were all alone, Miranda noticed. The campus was deserted, then suddenly it wasn't. Students appeared on the pathways. Long-hairs with headbands and straights with slide rules. Just what she remembered. "Tell me what everyone's been doing," Daniel said. "It's been what? Thirty years? Don't leave out a thing."

Miranda stooped and picked a small daisy out of the grass. She twirled it absentmindedly in her fingers. It left a green stain on her thumb. Daniel stopped walking and waited beside her. "Well," Miranda said. "I've lost touch with most of them. Gail got a job on *Le Monde*. She went to Germany for the re-unification. I heard she was living there. The anti-nuclear movement was her permanent beat. She could still be there, I suppose."

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"So she's still a radical," said Daniel. "What stamina."

"Margaret bought a bakery in San Francisco. Sixties cuisine. Whole grains. Tofu brownies. Heaviest cookies west of the Rockies. We're in the same cable chapter so I keep up with her better. I saw her last marriage on T.V. She's been married three times now, every one a loser."

"What about Allen?" Daniel asked.

"Allen," repeated Miranda. "Well, Allen had a promising career in jogging shoes. He was making great strides." She glanced at Daniel's face. "Sorry," she said. "Allen always brought out the worst in me. He lost his father in an air collision over Kennedy. Sued the airline and discovered he never had to work again. In short, Allen is rich. Last I heard, and this was maybe twenty years ago, he was headed to the Philippines to buy himself a submissive bride." She saw Daniel smile, the lines in his face deepening with his expression. "Oh, you'd like to blame me for Allen, wouldn't you?" she said. "But it wouldn't be fair. I dated him maybe three times, tops." Miranda shook her head. "Such an enthusiastic participant in the sexual revolution. And then it all turned to women's liberation on him. Poor Allen. We can only hope his tiny wife divorced him and won a large settlement when you could still get alimony."

Daniel moved closer to her and they began to walk again, passing under the shade of a redwood grove. The grass changed to needles under their feet. "You needn't be so hard on Allen," he said. "I never minded about him. I always knew you loved me."

"Did you?" asked Miranda anxiously. She looked at her feet, afraid to examine Daniel's face. My god, she was wearing moccasins. Had she ever worn moccasins? "I did get married, Daniel," she said. "I married a mathematician. His name was Michael." Miranda dropped her daisy, petals intact.

Daniel continued to walk, swinging his arms easily. "Well, you were always hot for mathematics. I didn't expect you to mourn me forever."

"So it's all right?"

Daniel stopped, turning to face her. He was still smiling, though it was not quite the smile she expected, not quite the easy, happy smile she remembered. "It's all right that you got married, Randy," he said softly. Something passed over his face and left it. "Hey!" he laughed again. "I remember something else from Physics 10. Zeno's paradox. You know what that is?"

"No," said Miranda.

"It's an argument. Zeno argued that motion was impossible because it required an object to pass through an infinite number of points in a finite amount of time." Daniel swung his arms energetically. "Think

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about it for a minute, Randy. Can you fault it? Then think about how far I came to be here with you."

"Miranda. Miranda." It was her mother's voice, rousing her for school. Only then it wasn't. It was Dr. Matsui who merely sounded maternal, despite the fact that she had no children of her own and was not yet thirty. Miranda felt her chair returning slowly to its upright position. "Are you back?" Dr. Matsui asked. "How did it go?"

"It was short," Miranda told her. She pulled the taped wires gently from her lids and opened her eyes. Dr. Matsui was seated beside her, reaching into Miranda's hair to detach the clips which touched her scalp.

"Perhaps we recalled you too early," she conceded. "Matthew spotted an apex so we pulled the plug. We just wanted a happy ending. It was happy, wasn't it?"

"Yes." Dr. Matsui's hair, parted on one side and curving smoothly under her chin, bobbed before Miranda's face. Miranda touched it briefly, then her own hair, her cheeks, and her nose. They felt solid under her hand, real, but no more so than Daniel had been. "Yes, it was," she repeated. "He was so happy to see me. So glad to be back. But, Anna, he was so real. I thought you said it would be like a dream."

"No," Dr. Matsui told her. "I said it *wouldn't* be. I said it was a memory of something that never happened and in that respect was like a dream. I wasn't speaking to the quality of the experience." She rolled her chair to the monitor and stripped the long feed-out sheet from it, tracing the curves quickly with one finger. Matthew, her technician, came to stand behind her. He leaned over her left shoulder, pointing. "There," he said. "That's Daniel. That's what I put in."

Dr. Matsui returned her chair to Miranda's side. "Here's the map," she said. "Maybe I can explain better."

Miranda tried to sit forward. One remaining clip pulled her hair and made her inhale sharply. She reached up to detach herself. "Sorry," said Dr. Matsui sheepishly. She held out the paper for Miranda to see. "The dark wave is the Daniel we recorded off your memories earlier. Happy memories, right? You can see the fainter echo here as you responded to it with the original memories. Think of it as memory squared. Naturally, it's going to be intense. Then, everything else here is the record of the additional activity you brought to this particular session. Look at these sharp peaks at the beginning. They indicate stress. You'll see that nowhere else do they recur. On paper it looks to have been an entirely successful session. Of course, only you know the content of the experience." Her dark eyes were searching and sympathetic. "Well," she said. "Do you feel better about him?"

"Yes," said Miranda. "I feel better."

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"Wonderful." Dr. Matsui handed the feedback to Matthew. "Store it," she told him.

Miranda spoke hesitatingly. "I had other things I wanted to say to him," she said. "It doesn't feel resolved."

"I don't think the sessions ever resolve things," Dr. Matsui said. "The best they can do is open the mind to resolution. The resolution still has to be found in the real world."

"Can I see him again?" Miranda asked.

Dr. Matsui interlaced her fingers and pressed them to her chest. "A repeat would be less expensive, of course," she said. "Since we've already got Daniel. We could just run him through again. Still, I'm reluctant to advise it. I wonder what else we could possibly gain."

"Please, Anna," said Miranda. She was looking down at her arms, remembering how firmly fleshed they had seemed.

"Let's wait and see how you're feeling after our next couple regular visits. If the old regrets persist and, more importantly, if they're still interfering with your ability to get on with things, then ask me again."

She was standing. Miranda swung her legs over the side of the chair and stood, too. Matthew walked with her to the door of the office. "We've got a goalie coming in next," he confided. "She stepped into the goal while holding the ball; she wants to remember it the way it didn't happen. Self-indulgent if you ask me. But then, athletes make the money, right?" He held the door open, his arm stretched in front of Miranda. "You feel better, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes," she reassured him.

She met Daniel for lunch at Frank Fats Cafe. They ordered fried clams and scallops, but the food never came. Daniel was twenty again and luminescent with youth. His hair was blond and his face was smooth. Had he really been so beautiful? Miranda wondered.

"I'd love a coke," he said. "I haven't had one in thirty years."

"You're kidding," said Miranda. "They don't have the real thing in heaven?"

Daniel looked puzzled.

"Skip it," she told him. "I was just wondering what it was like being dead. You could tell me."

"It's classified," said Daniel. "On a need to know basis."

Miranda picked up her fork which was heavy and cold. "This time it's you who looks wonderful. Positively beatific. Last time you looked so—" she started to say *old*, but amended it. After all, he had looked no older than she did these days. Such things were relative. "Tired," she finished.

"No, I wasn't tired," Daniel told her. "It was the war."

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"The war's over now," Miranda said and this time his smile was decidedly unpleasant.

"Is it?" he asked. "Just because you don't read about it in the paper now? Just because you watch the evening news and there's no body count in the corner of the screen?"

"Television's not like that now," Miranda began, but Daniel hadn't stopped talking.

"What's really going on in Southeast Asia? Do you even know?" Daniel shook his head. "Wars never end," he said. He leaned threateningly over the table. "Do you imagine for one minute that it's over for me?"

Miranda slammed her fork down. "Don't do that," she said. "Don't try to make me guilty of that, too. You didn't have to go. I begged you not to. Jesus, you knew what the war was. If you'd gone off to save the world from communist aggression, I would have disagreed, but I could have understood. But you knew better than that. I never forgave you for going."

"It was so easy for you to see what was right," Daniel responded angrily. "You were completely safe. You women could graduate without losing your deferment. Your goddamn birthday wasn't drawn twelfth in the draft lottery and if it had been you wouldn't have cared. When was your birthday drawn? You don't even know." Daniel leaned back and looked out the window. People appeared on the street. A woman in a red miniskirt got into a blue car. Then Daniel faced her again, large before Miranda. She couldn't shut him out. " 'Go to Canada,' you said. 'That's what I'd do.' I wonder. Could you have married your mathematician in Canada? I can just picture you saying good-bye to your mother forever."

"My mother's dead now," said Miranda. A knot of tears tightened about her throat.

"And so the hell am I." Daniel reached for her wrists, holding them too hard, hurting her deliberately. "But you're not, are you? You're just fine."

There was a voice behind Daniel. "Miranda. Miranda," it called.

"Mother," cried Miranda. But, of course it wasn't, it was Anna Matsui, gripping her wrists, bringing her back. Miranda gasped for breath and Dr. Matsui let go of her. "It was awful," said Miranda. She began to cry. "He accused me . . ." She pulled the wires from her eyes recklessly. Tears spilled out of them. Miranda ached all over.

"He accused you of nothing." Dr. Matsui's voice was sharp and disappointed. "You accused yourself. The same old accusations. We made Daniel out of you, remember?" She rolled her chair backward, moved to the monitor for the feedback. Matthew handed it to her and she read it, shaking her head. Her short black hair flew against her cheeks. "It shouldn't have happened," she said. "We used only the memories that

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made you happy. And with your gift for lucid dreaming—well, I didn't think there was a risk." Her face was apologetic as she handed Miranda a tissue and waited for the crying to stop. "Matthew wanted to recall you earlier," she confessed, "but I didn't want it to end this way."

"No!" said Miranda. "We can't stop now. I never answered him."

"You only need to answer yourself. It's your memory and imagination confronting you. He speaks only with your voice, he behaves only as you expect him to." Dr. Matsui examined the feedback map again. "I should never have agreed to a repeat. I certainly won't send you back." She looked at Miranda and softened her voice. "Lie still. Lie still until you feel better."

"Like in another thirty years?" asked Miranda. She closed her eyes; her head hurt from the crying and the wires. She reached up to detach one close to her ear. "Everything he said to me was true," she added tonelessly.

"Many things he didn't say are bound to be true as well," Dr. Matsui pointed out. "Therapy is not really concerned with truth which is almost always merely a matter of perspective. Therapy is concerned with adjustment—adjustment to an unchangeable situation or to a changing truth." She lifted a pen from her collar, clicking the point in and out absentmindedly. "In any given case," she continued, "we face a number of elements within our control and a far greater number beyond it. In a case such as yours, where the patient has felt profoundly and morbidly guilty over an extended period of time, it is because she is focusing almost exclusively on her own behavior. 'If only I hadn't done x,' she thinks, 'then y would never have happened.' Do you understand what I'm saying, Miranda?"

"No."

"In these sessions we try to show you what might have happened if the elements you couldn't control were changed. In your case we let you experience a continued relationship with Daniel. You see that you bore him no malice. You wished him nothing ill. If he had come back the bitterness of your last meeting would have been unimportant."

"He asked me to marry him," said Miranda. "He asked me to wait for him. I told you that. And I said that I was already seeing Allen. Allen! I said as far as I was concerned he was already gone."

"You wish you could change that, of course. But what you really want to change is his death and that was beyond your control." Dr. Matsui's face was sweet and intense.

Miranda shook her head. "You're not listening to me, Anna. I told you what happened, but I lied about why it happened. I pretended we had political differences. I thought my behavior would be palatable if it looked like a matter of conscience. But really I dated Allen for the first time

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before Daniel had even been drafted. Because I knew what was coming. I saw that his life was about to get complicated and messy. And I saw a way out of it. For me, of course. Not for him." Miranda began to pick unhappily at the loose skin around her nails. "What do you think of that?" she asked. "What do you think of me now?"

"What do *you* think?" Dr. Matsui said and Miranda responded in disgust.

"I know what *I* think. I think I'm sick of talking to myself. Is that the best you therapists can manage? I think I'll stay home and talk to the mirrors." She pulled off the remaining connections to her scalp and sat up. "Matthew," she said. "Matthew!"

Matthew came to the side of her chair. He looked thin, concerned, and awkward. What a baby he was, really, she thought. He couldn't be more than twenty-five. "How old are you, Matthew?" she asked.

"Twenty-seven."

"Be a hell of a time to die, wouldn't it?" She watched Matthew put a nervous hand on his short brown hair and run it backward. "I want your opinion about something, Matthew. A hypothetical case. I'm trusting you to answer honestly."

Matthew glanced at Dr. Matsui who gestured with her pen for him to go ahead. He turned back to Miranda. "What would you think of a woman who deserted her lover, a man she really claimed to love, because he got sick and she didn't want to face the unpleasantness of it?"

Matthew spoke carefully. "I would imagine that it was motivated by cowardice rather than cruelty," he said. "I think we should always forgive sins of cowardice. Even our own." He stood looking at Miranda with his earnest, innocent face.

"All right, Matthew," she said. "Thank you." She lay back down in the chair and listened to the hum of the idle machines. "Anna," she said. "He didn't behave as I expected. I mean, sometimes he did and sometimes he didn't. Even the first time."

"Tell me about it," said Dr. Matsui.

"The first session he was older than I expected. Like he hadn't died, but had continued to age along with me."

"Wish fulfillment."

"Yes, but I was *surprised* by it. And I was surprised by the setting. And he said something very odd right at the end. He quoted me Zeno's paradox and it really exists, but I never heard it before. It didn't sound like something Daniel would say, either. It sounded more like my husband, Michael. Where did it come from?"

"Probably from just where you said," Dr. Matsui told her. "Michael. You don't think you remember it, but obviously you did. And husbands and lovers are bound to resemble each other, don't you think? We often

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get bits of overlap. Our parents show up one way or another in almost all our memories." Dr. Matsui stood. "Come in Tuesday," she said. "We'll talk some more."

"I'd like to see him one more time," said Miranda.

"Absolutely not," Dr. Matsui answered, returning Miranda's chair to its upright position.

"Where are we, Daniel?" Miranda asked. She couldn't see anything.

"Camp Pendleton," he answered. "On the beach. I used to run here mornings. Guys would bring their girlfriends. Not me, of course."

Miranda watched the landscape fill in as he spoke. Fog remained. It was early and overcast. She heard the ocean and felt the wet, heavy air begin to curl her hair. She was barefoot on the sand and a little cold. "I'm so sorry, Daniel," she said. "That's all I ever really wanted to tell you. I loved you."

"I know you did." He put his arm around her. She leaned against him. I must look like his mother, she thought; in fact, her own son was older than Daniel now. She looked up at him carefully. He must have just arrived at camp. The hair had been all but shaved from his head.

"Maybe you were right, anyway," Daniel told her. "Maybe I just shouldn't have gone. I was so angry at you by then I didn't care anymore. I even thought about dying with some sense of anticipation. Petulant, you know, like a little kid. I'll go and get killed and *then* she'll be sorry."

"And she was," said Miranda. "God, was she." She turned to face him, pressed her lined cheek against his chest, smelled his clothes. He must have started smoking again. Daniel put both arms around her. She heard a gull cry out ecstatically.

"But when the time came I really didn't want to die." Daniel's voice took on an unfamiliar edge, frightened, slightly hoarse. "When the time came I was willing to do *anything* rather than die." He hid his face in her neck. "Do you have kids?" he asked. "Did you and Michael ever?"

"A son," she said.

"How old? About six?"

Miranda wasn't sure how old Jeremy was now. It changed every year. But she told him, wonderingly, "Of course not, Daniel. He's all grown up. He owns a pizza franchise, can you believe it? He thinks I'm a bore."

"Because I killed a kid during the war. A kid about six years old. I figured it was him or me. I shot him." Miranda pushed back from Daniel, trying to get a good look at his face. "They used kids, you know," he said. "They counted on us not being able to kill them. I saw this little boy coming for me with his hands behind his back. I told him to stop. I shouted at him to stop. I pointed my rifle and said I was going to kill him. But he kept coming."

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"Oh, Daniel," said Miranda. "Maybe he didn't speak English."

"A pointed rifle is universal. He walked into the bullet."

"What was he carrying?"

"Nothing," said Daniel. "How could I know?"

"Daniel," Miranda said. "I don't believe you. You wouldn't do that." Her words unsettled her even more. "Not the way I remember you," she said. "This is not the way I remember you."

"It's so easy for you to see what's right," said Daniel.

I'm going back, thought Miranda. Where am I really? I must be with Anna, but then she remembered that she was not. She was in her own study. She worked to feel the study chair beneath her, the ache in her back as she curved over her desk. Her feet dangled by the wheels; she concentrated until she could feel them. She saw her own hand, still holding her pencil, and she put it down. Things seemed very clear to her. She walked to the bedroom and summoned Dr. Matsui over the console. She waited perhaps fifteen minutes before Anna appeared.

"Daniel's the one with the problem," Miranda said. "It's not me, after all."

"There is no Daniel." Dr. Matsui's voice betrayed a startled concern. "Except in your mind and on my tapes. Apart from you, no Daniel."

"No. He came for me again. Just like in our sessions. Just as intense. Do you understand? Not a dream," she cut off Dr. Matsui's protest. "It was not a dream, because I wasn't asleep. I was working and then I was with him. I could feel him. I could smell him. He told me an absolutely horrible story about killing a child during the war. Where would I have gotten that? Not the sort of thing they send home in their letters to the bereaved."

"There were a thousand ugly stories out of Vietnam," said Dr. Matsui. "I know some and I wasn't even born yet. Or just barely born. Remember My Lai?" Miranda watched her image clasp its hands. "You heard this story somewhere. It became part of your concept of the war. So you put it together now with Daniel." Dr. Matsui's voice took on its professional patina. "I'd like you to come in, Miranda. Immediately. I'd like to take a complete read-out and keep you monitored a while. Maybe overnight. I don't like the turn this is taking."

"All right," said Miranda. "I don't want to be alone anyway. Because he's going to come again."

"No," said Dr. Matsui firmly. "He's not."

Miranda took the elevator to the garage and unlocked her bicycle. She was not frightened and wondered why not. She felt unhappy and uncertain, but in complete control of herself. She pushed out into the bike lane. When the helicopter appeared overhead, Miranda knew immediately where she was. A banana tree sketched itself in on her right. There

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was a smell in the air which was strange to her. Old diesel engines, which she recognized, but also something organic. A lushness almost turned to rot. In the distance the breathtaking green of rice growing. But the dirt at her feet was bare.

Miranda had never imagined a war could be so quiet. Then she heard the chopper. And she heard Daniel. He was screaming. He stood right next to her, beside a pile of sandbags, his rifle stretched out before him. A small, delicately featured child was just walking into Miranda's view, his arms held behind him. All Miranda had to do was lift her hand.

"No, Daniel," she said. "His hands are empty."

Daniel didn't move. The war stopped. "I killed him, Randy," said Daniel. "You can't change that."

Miranda looked at the boy. His eyes were dark, a streak of dust ran all the way up one shoulder and onto his face. He was barefoot. "I know," she said. "I can't help him." The child faded and disappeared. "I'm trying to help you." The boy reappeared again, back further, at the very edge of her vision. He was beautiful, unbearably young. He began to walk to them once more.

"*Can* you help me?" Daniel asked.

Miranda pressed her palm into his back. He wore no shirt and was slick and sweaty. "I don't know," she said. "Was it a crime of cowardice or of cruelty? I'm told you can be forgiven the one, but not the other."

Daniel dropped his rifle into the dirt. The landscape turned slowly about them, became mountainous. The air smelled cleaner and was cold.

A bird flew over them in a beautiful arc, and then it became a baseball and began to fall in slow motion, and then it became death and she could plot its trajectory. It was aimed at Daniel whose rifle had reappeared in his hands. Now, Miranda thought. She could stay and die with Daniel the way she'd always believed she should. Death moved so slowly in the sky. She could see it, moment to moment, descending like a series of scarcely differentiated still frames. "Look, Daniel," she said. "It's Zeno's paradox in reverse. Finite points. Infinite time." How long did she have to make this decision? A lifetime. Her lifetime.

Daniel would not look up. He reached out his hand to touch her hair. Gray, she knew. Her gray under his young hand. He was twenty-four. "Don't stay," he said. "Do you think I would have wanted you to? I would never have wanted that."

So Miranda moved from his hand and found she was glad to do so. "I always loved you," she said as if it mattered. "Good-bye, Daniel," but he had already looked away. Other soldiers materialized beside him and death grew to accommodate them. But they wouldn't all die. Some would survive in pieces, she thought. And some would survive whole. Wouldn't they? ●

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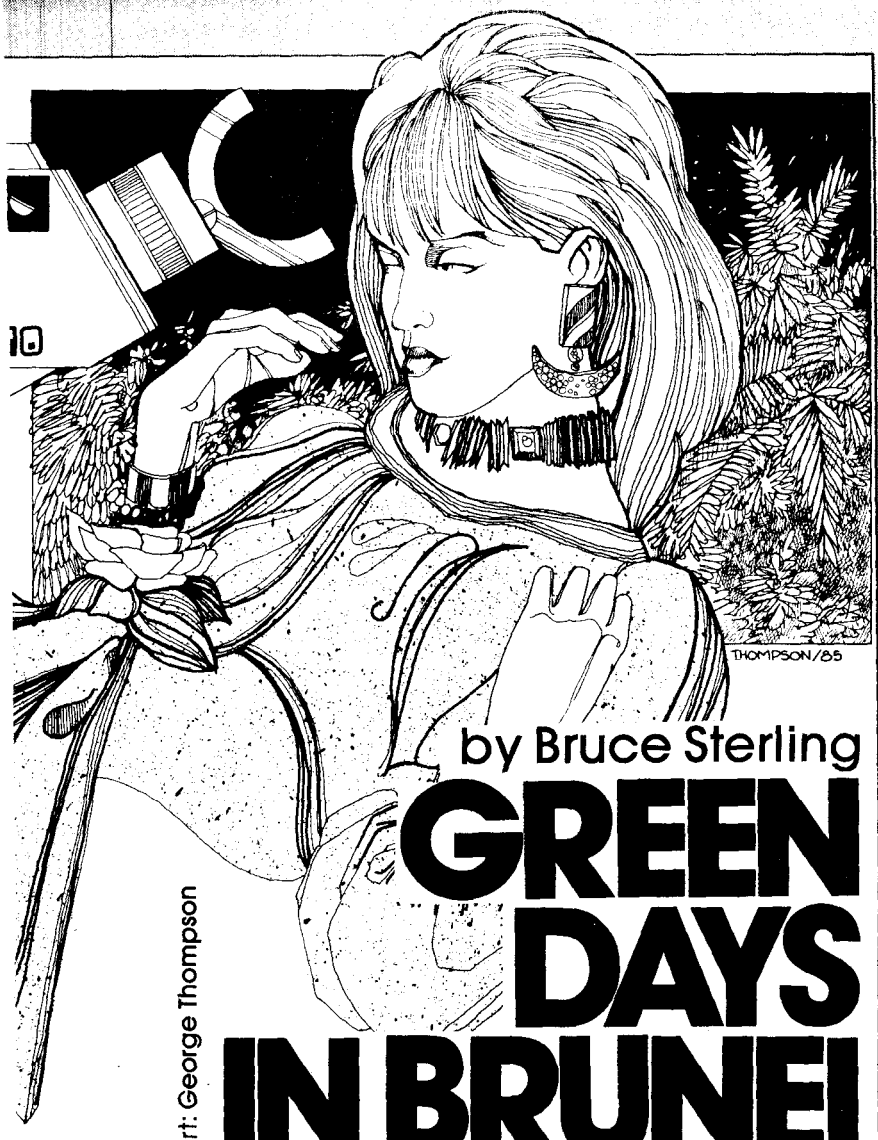

by Bruce Sterling

GREEN DAYS IN BRUNEI

art: George Thompson

The author is 31 and has lived in Madras, India and Austin, Texas. Mr. Sterling's work has appeared in *Omni*, *F&SF*, *Interzone*, and *Hayakawa's SF Magazine*. His latest novel, *Schismatrix*, was recently published by Arbor House.

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Two men were fishing from the corroded edge of an offshore oil rig. After years of decrepitude, the rig's concrete pillars were thick with barnacles and waving fronds of seaweed. The air smelled of rust and brine.

"Sorry to disturb your plans," the minister said. "But we can't just chat up the Yankees every time you hit a little contretemps." The minister reeled in and revealed a bare hook. He cursed mildly in his native Malay. "Hand me another bait, there's a good fellow."

Turner Choi reached into the wooden bait bucket and gave the minister a large dead prawn. "But I need that phone link," Turner said. "Just for a few hours. Just long enough to access the net in America and download some better documentation."

"What ghastly jargon," said the minister, who was formally known as the Yang Teramat Pehin Orang Kaya Amar Diraja Dato Seri Paduka Abdul Kahar. He was minister of industrial policy for the Sultanate of Brunei Darussalam, a tiny nation on the northern shore of the island of Borneo. The titles of Brunei's aristocracy were in inverse proportion to the country's size.

"It'd save us a lot of time, Tuan Minister," Turner said. "Those robots are programmed in an obsolete language, forty years old. Strictly Neanderthal."

The minister deftly baited his hook and flicked it out in a long spinning cast. "You knew before you came here how the sultanate feels about the world information order. You shall just have to puzzle out this conundrum on your own."

"But you're making weeks, months maybe, out of a three-hour job!" Turner said.

"My dear fellow, this is Borneo," the minister said benignly. "Stop looking at your watch and pay some attention to catching us dinner."

Turner sighed and reeled in his line. Behind them, the rig's squatter population of Dayak fisherfolk clustered on the old helicopter pad, mending nets and chewing betel-nut.

It was another slow Friday in Brunei Darussalam. Across the shallow bay, Brunei Town rose in tropical sunlight, its soaring high-rises festooned with makeshift solar roofs, windmills, and bulging greenhouse balconies. The golden-domed mosque on the waterfront was surrounded by the towering legacy of the twentieth-century oil boom: boxlike office blocks, now bizarrely transmuted into urban farms.

Brunei Town, the sultanate's capital, had a hundred thousand citizens: Malays, Chinese, Ibans, Dayaks, and a sprinkling of Europeans. But it was a city under a hush. No cars. No airport. No television. From a distance it reminded Turner of an old Western fairy tale: Sleeping Beauty, the jury-rigged high-rises with their cascading greenery like a

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hundred castles shrouded in thorns. The Bruneians seemed like sleepwalkers, marooned from the world, wrapped in the enchantment of their ideology.

Turner baited his hook again, restive at being away from the production line. The minister seemed more interested in converting him than in letting him work. To the Bruneians, the robots were just another useless memento of their long-dead romance with the West. The old robot assembly line hadn't been used in twenty years, since the turn of the century.

And yet the royal government had decided to retrofit the robot line for a new project. For technical help, they had applied to Kyocera, a Japanese multinational corporation. Kyocera had sent Turner Choi, one of their new recruits, a twenty-six-year-old Chinese Canadian CAD-CAM engineer from Vancouver.

It wasn't much of a job—a kind of industrial archeology whose main tools were chicken-wire and a ball-peen hammer—but it was Turner's first and he meant to succeed. The Bruneians were relaxed to the point of coma, but Turner Choi had his future ahead of him with Kyocera. In the long run, it was Kyocera who would judge his work here. And Turner was running out of time.

The minister, whooping in triumph, hauled hard on his line. A fat, spotted fish broke the surface, flopping on the hook. Turner decided to break the rules and to hell with it.

The local neighborhood organization, the *kampong,* was showing a free movie in the little park fourteen stories below Turner's window. Bright images crawled against the bleak white Bauhaus wall of a neighboring high-rise.

Turner peered down through the blinds. He had been watching the flick all night as he finished his illegal tinkering.

The Bruneians, like Malays everywhere, adored ghost stories. The film's protagonist, or chief horror (Turner wasn't sure which) was an acrobatic monkey-demon with razor-sharp forearms. It had burst into a depraved speakeasy and was slaughtering drunkards with a tremendous windmilling flurry of punches, kicks, and screeches. Vast meaty sounds of combat, like colliding freight trains packed with beef, drifted faintly upward.

Turner sat before his bootleg keyboard, and sighed. He'd known it would come to this ever since the Bruneians had confiscated his phone at the customs. For five months he'd politely tried to work his way around it. Now he had only three months left. He was out of time and out of patience.

The robots were okay, under caked layers of yellowing grease. They'd

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been roped down under tarps for years. But the software manuals were a tattered ruin.

Just thinking about it gave Turner a cold sinking feeling. It was a special, private terror that had dogged him since childhood. It was the fear he felt when he had to confront his grandfather.

He thought of his grandfather's icy and pitiless eyes, fixed on him with that "Hong Kong Bad Cop" look. In the 1970s, Turner's grandfather had been one of the infamous "millionaire sergeants" of the Hong Kong police, skimming the cream of the Burmese heroin trade. He'd emigrated in the Triad bribery scandals of 1973.

After forty-seven years of silk suits and first class flights between his mansions in Taipei and Vancouver, Grandfather Choi still had that cold eye and that grim shakedown look. It was an evil memory for Turner, of being weighed and found wanting.

The documentation was hopeless, crumbling and mildewed, alive with silverfish. The innocent Bruneians hadn't realized that the information it held was the linchpin of the whole enterprise. The sultanate had bought the factory long ago, with the last gush of Brunei's oil money, as a stylish, doomed gesture in Western industrial chic. Somehow, robots had never really caught on in Borneo.

But Turner had to seize this chance. He had to prove that he could make it on his own, without Grandfather Choi and the stifling weight of his money.

For days, Turner had snooped around down on the waterfront, with its cubbyholed rows of Chinese junkshops. It was Turner's favorite part of Brunei Town, a white-elephant's graveyard of dead tech. The wooden and bamboo shops were lined with dead, blackened televisions like decaying teeth.

There, he'd set about assembling a bootleg modern phone. He'd rescued a water-stained keyboard and screen from one of the shops. His modem and recorder came from work. On the waterfront he'd found a Panamanian freighter whose captain would illegally time-share on his satellite navigation dish.

Brunei Town was full of phone booths that no one ever seemed to use, grimy old glass-and-plastic units labeled in Malay, English, and Mandarin. A typical payphone stood on the street outside Turner's high-rise. It was an old twentieth-century job with a coin-feed and a rotary dial, and no video screen.

In the dead of night he'd crept down there to install a radio link to his apartment on the fourteenth floor. Someone might trace his illegal call back to the phone booth, but no farther. With the radio link, his own apartment would stay safe.

But when he'd punch-jacked the payphone's console off, he'd found that

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it already had a bootleg link hooked up. It was in fine working order, too. He'd seen then that he wasn't alone, and that Brunei, despite all its rhetoric about the Neo-Colonial World Information Order, was not entirely free of the global communications net. Brunei was wired too, just like the West, but the net had gone underground.

All those abandoned payphones had taken on a new and mildly sinister significance for him since that discovery, but he wasn't going to kick. All his plans were riding on his chance to get through.

Now he was ready. He re-checked the satellite guide in the back of his ASME Handbook. Arabsat 7 was up, in its leisurely low-orbit ramble over the tropics. Turner dialed from his apartment down through the payphone outside, then patched in through the Panamanian dish. Through Arabsat he hooked up to an American geosynchronous sat and down into the American ground net. From there he direct-dialed his brother's house.

Georgie Choi was at breakfast in Vancouver, dressed in a French-cuffed pinstripe shirt and varsity sweater. Behind him, Turner's sleek sister-in-law, Marjorie, presided over a table crowded with crisp linen napkins and silver cutlery. Turner's two young nieces decorously spread jam on triangles of toast.

"Is it you, Turner?" Georgie said. "I'm not getting any video."

"I couldn't get a camera," Turner said. "I'm in Brunei—phone quarantine, remember? I had to bootleg it just to get sound."

A monsoon breeze blew up outside Turner's window. The windpower generators bolted to the high-rise walls whirred into life, and threw broad bars of raw static across the screen. Georgie's smooth brow wrinkled gracefully. "This reception is terrible! You're not even in stereo." He smiled uncertainly. "No matter, we'll make do. We haven't heard from you in ages. Things all right?"

"They will be," Turner said. "How's Grandfather?"

"He's flown in from Taipei for dialysis and his blood change," Georgie said. "He hates hospitals, but I had good news for him." He hesitated. "We have a new great-grandchild on the way."

Marjorie glanced up and bestowed one of her glittering wifely smiles on the camera. "That's fine," Turner said reflexively. Children were a touchy subject with Turner. He had not yet married, despite his family's endless prodding and nagging.

He thought guiltily that he should have spent more time with Georgie's children. Georgie was already in some upscale never-neverland, all leather-bound law and municipal politics, but it wasn't his kids' fault. Kids were innocent. "Hi kids," he said in Mandarin. "I'll bring you something you'll like."

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The younger girl looked up, her elegant child's mouth crusted with strawberry jam. "I want a shrunken head," she said in English.

"You see?" Georgie said with false joviality. "This is what comes of running off to Borneo."

"I need some modem software," Turner said, avoiding the issue. Grandfather hadn't approved of Borneo. "Could you get it off the old Hayes in my room?"

"If you don't have a modem protocol, how can I send you a program?" Georgie said.

"Print it out and hold it up to the screen," Turner explained patiently. "I'll record it and type it in later by hand."

"That's clever," Georgie said. "You engineers."

He left to set it up. Turner talked guardedly to Marjorie. He had never been able to figure the woman out. Turner would have liked to know how Marjorie really felt about cold-eyed Bad Cop Grandfather and his eight million dollars in Triad heroin money.

But Marjorie was so coolly elegant, so brilliantly designed, that Turner had never been able to bring himself to probe her real feelings. It would have been like popping open some factory-sealed peripheral that was still under warranty, just so you could sneak a look at the circuit boards.

Even he and Georgie never talked frankly any more. Not since Grandfather's health had turned shaky. The prospect of finally inheriting that money had left a white hush over his family like fifteen feet of Canadian snow.

The horrible old man relished the competition for his favor. He insisted on it. Grandfather had a second household in Taipei; Turner's uncle and cousins. If Grandfather chose them over his Canadian brood, Georgie's perfect life would go to pieces.

A childhood memory brushed Turner: Georgie's toys, brightly painted little Hong Kong wind-ups held together with folded tin flaps. As a child, Turner had spent many happy, covert hours dexterously prying Georgie's toys apart.

Marjorie chatted about Turner's mother, a neurotic widow who ran an antique store in Atlanta. Behind her, a Chinese maid began clearing the table, glancing up at the camera with the spooked eyes of an immigrant fresh off the boat.

Turner was used to phone cameras, and though he didn't have one he kept a fixed smile through habit. But he could feel himself souring, his face knotting up in that inherited Bad Cop glare. Turner had his Grandfather's face, with hollow cheeks, and sunken eyes under heavy, impressive brows.

But Canada, Turner's birthplace, had left its mark on him. Years of

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steak and Wonder Bread had given him a six-foot frame and the build of a linebacker.

Georgie came back with the printout. Turner said goodbye and cut the link.

He pulled up the blinds for the climax of the movie downstairs. The monkey-demon massacred a small army of Moslem extremists in the corroded remnants of a Shell refinery. Moslem fanatics had been stock villains in Brunei since the failure of their coup of '98.

The last of the reel flickered loose. Turner unpinned a banana-leaf wrapping and dug his chopsticks into a midnight snack of rice fried with green pineapple. He leaned on the open window, propping one booted foot on the massive windowbox with its dense ranks of onions and pepper plants.

The call to Vancouver had sent a shiver of culture shock through him. He saw his apartment with new eyes. It was decorated with housewarming gifts from other members of his *kampong*. A flat leather shadow-puppet, all perforations and curlicues. A gold-framed photo of the sultan shaking hands with the king of England. A hand-painted glass ant farm full of inch-long Borneo ants, torpid on molasses. And a young banyan bonsai tree from the *kampong* headman.

The headman, an elderly Malay, was a political wardheeler for Brunei's ruling party, the Greens, or "Partai Ekolojasi." In the West, the Greens had long ago been co-opted into larger parties. But Brunei's Partai Ekolojasi had twenty years of deep roots.

The banyan tree came with five pages of meticulous instructions on care and feeding, but despite Turner's best efforts the midget tree was yellowing and shedding leaves. The tree was not just a gift; it was a test, and Turner knew it. The *kampong* smiled, but they had their ways of testing, and they watched.

Turner glanced reflexively at his deadbolt on the door. The locks were not exactly forbidden, but they were frowned on. The Greens had converted Brunei's old office buildings into huge multilayered village longhouses. Western notions of privacy were unpopular.

But Turner needed the lock for his work. He had to be discreet. Brunei might seem loose and informal, but it was still a one-party state under autocratic rule.

Twenty years earlier, when the oil crash had hit, the monarchy had seemed doomed. The Muslim insurgents had tried to murder them outright. Even the Greens had had bigger dreams then. Turner had seen their peeling, forgotten wall posters, their global logo of the Whole Earth half-buried under layered years of want-ads and soccer schedules.

The Royal Family had won through, a symbol of tradition and stability. They'd weathered the storm of the Muslim insurgence, and stifled the

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Greens' first wild ambitions. After five months in Brunei, Turner, like the Royals, had grasped Brunei's hidden dynamics. It was *adat,* Malay custom, that ruled. And the first law of *adat* was that you didn't embarrass your neighbors.

Turner unpinned his favorite movie poster, a big promotional four-sheet for a Brunei historical epic. In garish four-color printing, a boatload of heroic Malay pirates gallantly advanced on a sinister Portuguese galleon. Turner had carved a hideout in the sheetrock wall behind the poster. He stowed his phone gear.

Somebody tried the door, hit the deadbolt, and knocked softly. Turner hastily smoothed the poster and pinned it up.

He opened the door. It was his Australian neighbor, McGinty, a retired newscaster from Melbourne. McGinty loved Brunei for its utter lack of televisions. It was one of the last places on the planet in which one could truly get away from it all.

McGinty glanced up and down the hall, stepped inside, and reached into his loose cotton blouse. He produced a cold quart can of Foster's Lager. "Have a beer, chum?"

"Fantastic!" Turner said. "Where'd you get it?"

McGinty smiled evasively. "The bloody fridge is on the blink, and I thought you'd fancy one while they're still cold."

"Right," Turner said, popping the top. "I'll have a look at your fridge as soon as I destroy this evidence." The *kampong* ran on a web of barter and mutual obligation. Turner's skills were part of it. It was tiresome, but a Foster's Lager was good pay. It was a big improvement over the liquid brain damage from the illegal stills down on Floor 4.

They went to McGinty's place. McGinty lived next door with his aged parents; four of them, for his father and mother had divorced and both remarried. The ancient Australians thrived in Brunei's somnolent atmosphere, pottering about the *kampong* gardens in pith helmets, gurkha shorts, and khaki bush vests. McGinty, like many of his generation, had never had children. Now in retirement he seemed content to shepherd these older folk, plying them with megavitamins and morning Tai Chi exercises.

Turner stripped the refrigerator. "It's your compressor," he said. "I'll track you down one on the waterfront. I can jury-rig something. You know me. Always tinkering."

McGinty looked uncomfortable, since he was now in Turner's debt. Suddenly he brightened. "There's a party at the privy councilor's tomorrow night. Jimmy Brooke. You know him?"

"Heard of him," Turner said. He'd heard rumors about Brooke: hints of corruption, some long-buried scandal. "He was a big man when the Partai got started, right? Minister of something."

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"Communications."

Turner laughed. "That's not much of a job around here."

"Well, he still knows a lot of movie people." McGinty lowered his voice. "And he has a private bar. He's chummy with the Royal Family. They make allowances for him."

"Yeah?" Turner didn't relish mingling with McGinty's social circle of wealthy retirees, but it might be smart, politically. A word with the old com minister might solve a lot of his problems. "Okay," he said. "Sounds like fun."

The privy councilor, Yang Amat Mulia Pengiran Indera Negara Pengiran Jimmy Brooke, was one of Brunei's odder relics. He was a British tax exile, a naturalized Bruneian, who had shown up in the late '90s after the oil crash. His wealth had helped cushion the blow and had won him a place in the government.

Larger and better-organized governments might have thought twice about co-opting this deaf, white-haired eccentric, a washed-up pop idol with a parasitic retinue of balding bohemians. But the aging rock star, with his decaying glamor, fit in easily with the comic-opera glitter of Brunei's tiny aristocracy. He owned the old Bank of Singapore office block, a *kampong* of remarkable looseness where peccadillos flourished under Brooke's noblesse oblige.

Monsoon rain pelted the city. Brooke's henchmen, paunchy bodyguards in bulging denim, had shut the glass doors of the penthouse and turned on the air conditioning. The party had close to a hundred people, mostly retired Westerners from Europe and Australia. They had the stifling clubbiness of exiles who have all known each other too long. A handful of refugee Americans, still powdered and rouged with their habitual video makeup, munched imported beer nuts by the long mahogany bar.

The Bruneian actress Dewi Serrudin was holding court on a rattan couch, surrounded by admirers. Cinema was a lost art in the West, finally murdered and buried by video; but Brunei's odd policies had given it a last toe-hold. Turner, who had a mild, long-distance crush on the actress, edged up between two hopeful *émigrés:* a portly Madrasi producer in dhoti and jubbah, and a Hong Kong chop-socky director in a black frogged cotton jacket.

Miss Serrudin, in a gold lamé blouse and a skirt of antique ultrasuede, was playing the role to the hilt, chattering brightly and chain-burning imported Rothmans in a jade holder. She had the ritual concentration of a Balinese dancer evoking postures handed down through the centuries. And she was older than he'd thought she was.

Turner finished his whiskey sour and handed it to one of Brooke's balding gofers. He felt depressed and lonely. He wandered away from the

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crowd, and turned down a hall at random. The walls were hung with gold albums and old, yellowing pub-shots of Brooke and his band, all rhinestones and platform heels, their flying hair lavishly backlit with klieg lights.

Turner passed a library, and a billiards room where two wrinkled, turbaned Sikhs were racking up a game of snooker. Further down the hall, he glanced through an archway, into a sunken conversation pit lavishly carpeted with ancient, indestructible synthetic plush.

A bony young Malay woman in black jeans and a satin jacket sat alone in the room, reading a month-old issue of NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS. It was headlined "Leningrad Pop Cuts Loose!" Her sandaled feet were propped on a coffee table next to a beaten silver platter with a pitcher and an ice-bucket on it. Her bright red, shoulder-length hair showed two long inches of black roots.

She looked up at him in blank surprise. Turner hesitated at the archway, then stepped into the room. "Hi," he said.

"Hello. What's your *kampong?*"

"Citibank Building," Turner said. He was used to the question by now. "I'm with the industrial ministry, consulting engineer. I'm a Canadian. Turner Choi."

She folded the newspaper and smiled. "Ah, you're the bloke who's working on the robots."

"Word gets around," Turner said, pleased.

She watched him narrowly. "Seria Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah."

"Sorry, I don't speak Malay."

"That's my name," she said.

Turner laughed. "Oh Lord. Look, I'm just a no-neck Canuck with hay in my hair. Make allowances, okay?"

"You're a Western technician," she said. "How exotic. How is your work progressing?"

"It's a strange assignment," Turner said. He sat on the couch at a polite distance, marveling at her bizarre accent. "You've spent some time in Britain?"

"I went to school there." She studied his face. "You look rather like a Chinese Keith Richards."

"Sorry, don't know him."

"The guitarist of the Rolling Stones."

"I don't keep up with the new bands," Turner said. "A little Russian pop, maybe." He felt a peculiar tension in the situation. Turner glanced quickly at the woman's hands. No wedding ring, so that wasn't it.

"Would you like a drink?" the woman said. "It's grape juice."

"Sure," Turner said. "Thanks." She poured gracefully: innocent grape

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juice over ice. She was a Moslem, Turner thought, despite her dyed hair. Maybe that was why she was oddly standoffish.

He would have to bend the rules again. She was not conventionally pretty, but she had the kind of neurotic intensity that Turner had always found fatally attractive. And his love life had suffered in Brunei; the *kampongs* with their prying eyes and village gossip had cramped his style.

He wondered how he could arrange to see her. It wasn't a question of just asking her out to dinner—it all depended on her *kampong*. Some were stricter than others. He might end up with half-a-dozen veiled Muslim chaperones—or maybe a gang of muscular cousins and brothers with a bad attitude about Western lechers.

"When do you plan to start production, Mr. Choi?"

Turner said, "We've built a few fishing skiffs already, just minor stuff. We have bigger plans once the robots are up."

"A real factory," she said. "Like the old days."

Turner smiled, seeing his chance. "Maybe you'd like a tour of the plant?"

"It sounds romantic," she said. "Those robots are free labor. They were supposed to take the place of our free oil when it ran out. Brunei used to be rich, you know. Oil paid for everything. The Shellfare state, they used to call us." She smiled wistfully.

"How about Monday?" Turner said.

She looked at him, surprised, and suddenly blushed. "I'm afraid not."

Turner caught her eye. It's not me, he thought. It was something in the way—*adat* or something. "It's all right," he said gently. "I'd like to see you, is that so bad? Bring your whole *kampong* if you want."

"My *kampong* is the Palace," she said.

"Uh-oh." Suddenly he had that cold feeling again.

"You didn't know," she said triumphantly. "You thought I was just some rock groupie."

"Who are you, then?"

"I'm the Duli Yang Maha Mulia Diranee . . . Well, I'm the princess. Princess Seria." She smiled.

"Good lord." He had been sitting and flirting with the royal princess of Brunei. It was bizarre. He half expected a troupe of bronzed eunuchs to burst in, armed with scimitars. "You're the sultan's daughter?"

"You mustn't think too much of it," she said. "Our country is only two thousand square miles. It's so small that it's a family business, that's all. The mayor of your Vancouver rules more people than my family does."

Turner sipped his grape juice to cover his confusion. Brunei was a

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Commonwealth country, after all, with a British-educated aristocracy. The sultan had polo ponies and cricket pitches. But still, a princess . . .

"I never said I was from Vancouver," he told her. "You knew who I was all along."

"Brunei doesn't have many tall Chinese in lumberjack shirts." She smiled wickedly. "And those boots."

Turner glanced down. His legs were armored in knee-high engineering boots, a mass of shiny leather and buckles. His mother had bought them for him, convinced that they would save his life from snakebite in savage Borneo. "I promised I'd wear them," he said. "Family obligation."

She looked sour. "You, too? That sounds all too familiar, Mr. Choi." Now that the spell of anonymity was broken, she seemed flustered. Their quick rapport was grinding to a halt. She lifted the music paper with a rustle of pages. He saw that her nails were gnawed down to the quick.

For some perverse reason this put Turner's libido jarringly back into gear. She had that edgy flyaway look that spelled trouble with a capital "T." Ironically, she was just his type.

"I know the mayor's daughter in Vancouver," he said deliberately. "I like the local version a lot better."

She met his eyes. "It's really too bad about family obligations. . . ."

The privy councilor appeared suddenly in the archway. The wizened rock star wore a cream-colored seersucker suit with ruby cufflinks. He was a cadaverous old buzzard with rheumy eyes and a wattled neck. A frizzed mass of snow-white hair puffed from his head like cotton from an aspirin bottle.

"Highness," he said loudly. "We need a fourth at bridge."

Princess Seria stood up with an air of martyrdom. "I'll be right with you," she shouted.

"And who's the young man?" said Brooke, revealing his dentures in an uneasy smile.

Turner stepped nearer. "Turner Choi, Tuan Privy Councilor," he said loudly. "A privilege to meet you, sir."

"What's your *kampong*, Mr. Chong?"

"Mr. Choi is working on the robot shipyard!" the princess said.

"The what? The shipyard? Oh, splendid." Brooke seemed relieved.

"I'd like a word with you, sir," Turner said. "About communications."

"About what?" Brooke cupped one hand to his ear.

"The phone net, sir! A line out!"

The princess looked startled. But Brooke, still not understanding, nodded blankly. "Ah yes. Very interesting . . . My entourage and I will bop by some day when you have the line up! I love the sound of good machines at work!"

"Sure," Turner said, recognizing defeat. "That would be, uh, groovy."

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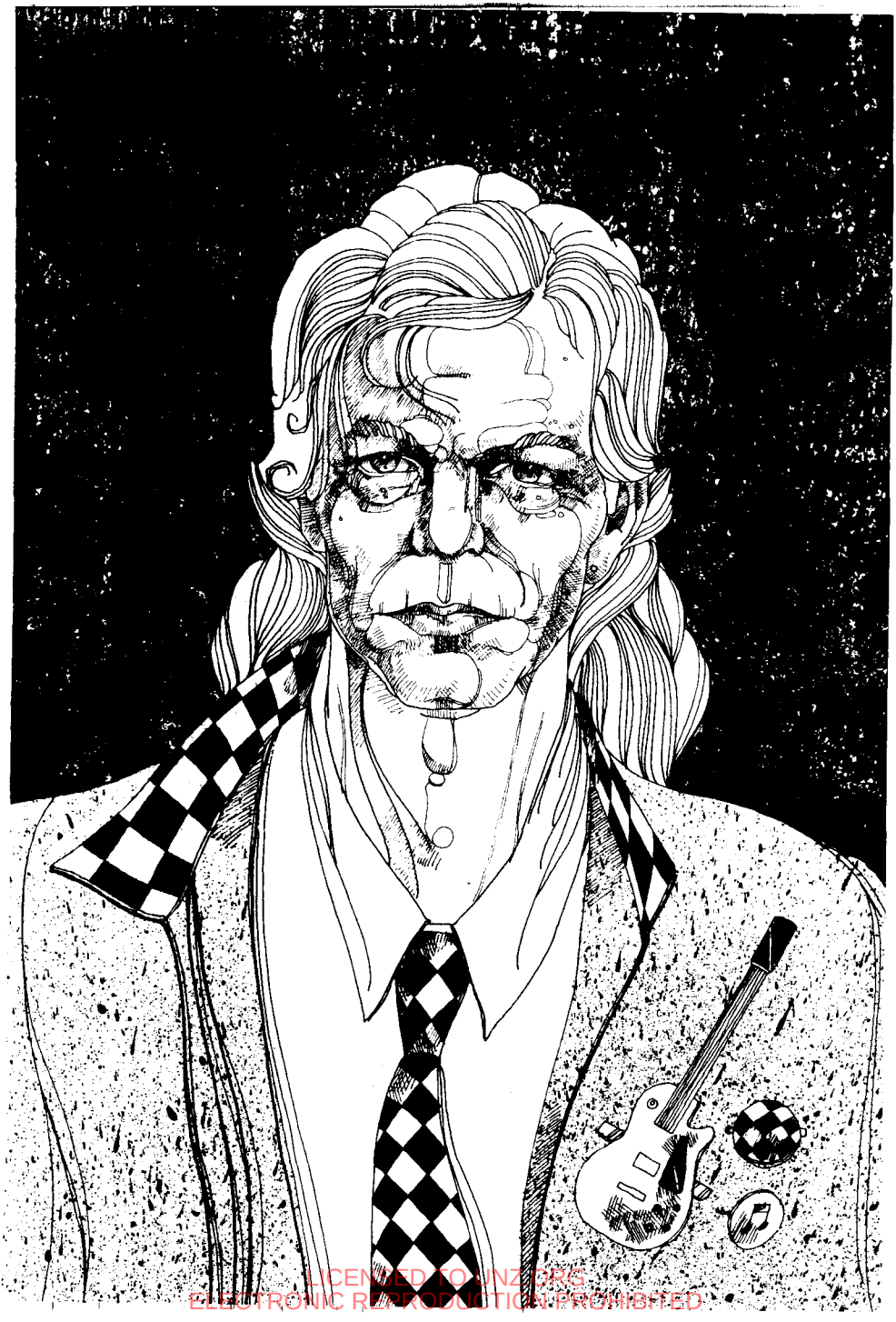

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"Brunei is counting on you, Mr. Chong," Brooke said, his wrinkled eyes gleaming with bogus sincerity. "Good to see you here. Enjoy yourself." He shook Turner's hand, pressing something into his palm. He winked at Turner and escorted the Princess out into the hall.

Turner looked at his hand. The old man had given him a marijuana cigarette. Turner shook himself, laughed, and threw it away.

Another slow Monday in Brunei Town. Turner's work crew meandered in around midmorning. They were Bruneian Chinese, toting wicker baskets stuffed with garden-fresh produce, and little lacquered lunchboxes with *satay* shishkabobs and hot shrimp paste. They started the morning's food barter, chatting languidly in Malay-accented Mandarin.

Turner had very little power over them. They were hired by the Industrial Ministry, and paid little or nothing. Their labor was part of the invisible household economy of the *kampongs*. They worked for *kampong* perks, like chickens or movie tickets.

The shipyard was a cavernous barn with overhead pulley tracks and an oil-stained concrete floor. The front section, with its bare launching rails sloping down to deep water, had once been a Dayak *kampong*. The Dayaks had spraybombed the concrete-block walls with giant neon-bright murals of banshees dead in childbirth, and leaping cricket-spirits with evil dayglo eyes.

The back part was two-story, with the robots' machine shop at ground level and a glass-fronted office upstairs that looked down over the yard.

Inside, the office was decorated in crass '80s High-Tech Moderne, with round-cornered computer desks between sleek modular partitions, all tubular chrome and grainy beige plastic. The plastic had aged hideously in forty years, absorbing a gray miasma of fingerprints and soot.

Turner worked alone in the neck-high maze of curved partitions, where a conspiracy of imported clerks and programmers had once efficiently sopped up the last of Brunei's oil money. He was typing up the bootlegged modem software on the IBM, determined to call America and get the production line out of the Stone Age.

The yard reeked of hot epoxy as the crew got to work. The robots were one-armed hydraulic jobs, essentially glorified tea-trolleys with single, swivel-jointed manipulators. Turner had managed to get them up to a certain crude level of donkey-work: slicing wood, stirring glue, hauling heavy bundles of lumber.

But, so far, the crew handled all the craft-work. They laminated the long strips of shaved lumber into sturdy panels of epoxied plywood. They bent the wet panels into hull and deck shapes, steam-sealing them over curved molds. They lapped and veneered the seams, and painted good-luck eye-symbols on the bows.

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So far, the plant had produced nothing larger than a twenty-foot skiff. But on the drawing boards was a series of freighter-sized floating *kampongs,* massive sail-powered trimarans for the deep ocean, with glassed-in greenhouse decks.

The ships would be cheap and slow, like most things in Brunei, but pleasant enough, Turner supposed. Lots of slow golden afternoons on the tropical seas, with plenty of fresh fruit. The whole effort seemed rather pointless, but at least it would break Brunei's isolation from the world, and give them a crude merchant fleet.

The foreman, a spry old Chinese named Leng, shouted for Turner from the yard. Turner saved his program, got up, and looked down through the office glass. The minister of industrial policy had arrived, tying up an ancient fiberglass speedboat retrofitted with ribbed lateen sails.

Turner hurried down, groaning to himself, expecting to be invited off for another avuncular lecture. But the minister's zen-like languor had been broken. He came almost directly to the point, pausing only to genially accept some coconut milk from the foreman.

"It's His Highness the Sultan," the minister said. "Someone's put a bee in his bonnet about these robots. Now he wants to tour the plant."

"When?" Turner said.

"Two weeks," said the minister. "Or maybe three."

Turner thought it over, and smiled. He sensed the princess's hand in this and felt deeply flattered.

"I say," the minister said. "You seem awfully pleased for a fellow who was predicting disaster just last Friday."

"I found another section of the manual," Turner lied glibly. "I hope to have real improvements in short order."

"Splendid," said the minister. "You remember the prototype we were discussing?"

"The quarter-scale model?" Turner said. "Tuan Minister, even in miniature, that's still a fifty-foot trimaran."

"Righto. How about it? Do you think you could scatter the blueprints about, have the robots whir by looking busy, plenty of sawdust and glue?"

Politics, Turner thought. He gave the minister his Bad Cop look. "You mean some kind of Potemkin village. Don't you want the ship built?"

"I fail to see what pumpkins have to do with it," said the minister, wounded. "This is a state occasion. We shall have the newsreel cameras in. Of course build the ship. I simply want it impressive, that's all."

Impressive, Turner thought. Sure. If Seria was watching, why not?

Luckily the Panamanian freighter was still in port, not leaving till Wednesday. Armed with his new software, Turner tried another bootleg raid at ten P.M. He caught a Brazilian comsat and tied into Detroit.

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Reception was bad, and Doris had already moved twice. But he found her finally in a seedy condominium in the Renaissance Center historical district.

"Where's your video, man?"

"It's out," Turner lied, not wanting to burden his old girlfriend with two years of past history. He and Doris had lived together in Toronto for two semesters, while he studied CAD-CAM. Doris was an automotive designer, a rust-belt refugee from Detroit's collapse.

For Turner, school was a blissful chance to live in the same pair of jeans for days on end, but times were tough in the Rust Belt and Doris had lived close to the bone. He'd ended up footing the bills, which hadn't bothered him (Bad Cop money), but it had preyed on Doris's mind. Months passed, and she spent more each week. He picked up her bills without a word, and she quietly went over the edge. She ended up puking drunk on her new satin sheets, unable to go downstairs for the mail without a line of coke.

But then word had come of his father's death. His father's antique Maserati had slammed head-on into an automated semi-trailer rig. Turner and his brother had attended the cremation in a drizzling Vancouver rain. They put the ashes on the family altar and knelt before little gray ribbons of incense smoke. Nobody said much. They didn't talk about Dad's drinking. Grandfather wouldn't have liked it.

When he'd gone back to Toronto, he found that Doris had packed up and left.

"I'm with Kyocera now," he told her. "The consulting engineers."

"You got a job, Turner?" she said, brushing back a frizzed tangle of blonde hair. "It figures. Poor people are standing in line for a chance to do dishes." She frowned. "What kind of hours you keeping, man? It's seven A.M. You caught me without my vid makeup."

She turned the camera away and walked out of sight. Turner studied her apartment: concrete blocks and packing crates, vinyl beanbag chairs, peeling walls festooned with printout. She was still on the Net, all right. Real Net-heads resented every penny not spent on information.

"I need some help, Doris. I need you to find me someone who can system-crack an old IBM robotics language called AML."

"Yeah?" she called out. "Ten percent agent's fee?"

"Sure. And this is on the hush, okay? Not Kyocera's business, just mine."

He heard her shouting from the condo's cramped bathroom. "I haven't heard from you in two years! You're not mad that I split, huh?"

"No."

"It wasn't that you were Chinese, okay? I mean, you're about as Chinese

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as maple syrup, right? It's just, the high life was making my sinuses bleed."

Turner scowled. "Look, it's okay. It was a temporary thing."

"I was crazy then. But I've been hooked up to a good shrink program, it's done wonders for me, really." She came back to the screen; she'd put on rouge and powder. She smiled and touched her cheek. "Good stuff, huh? The kind the President uses."

"You look fine."

"My shrink makes me jog every day. So, how you doin', man? Seeing anybody?"

"Not really." He smiled. "Except a princess of Borneo."

She laughed. "I thought you'd settle down by now, man. With some uptown family girl, right? Like your brother and what's-her-face."

"Didn't work out that way."

"You like crazy women, Turner, that's your problem. Remember the time your mom dropped by? She's a fruitcake, that's why."

"Aw, Jesus Christ, Doris," Turner said. "If I need a shrink, I can download one."

"Okay," she said, hurt. She touched a remote control. A television in the corner of the room flashed into life with a crackle of video music. Doris didn't bother to watch it. She'd turned it on by reflex, settling into the piped flow of cable like a hot bath. "Look, I'll see what I can scare you up on the Net. AML language, right? I think I know a—"

BREAK

The screen went blank. Alphanumerics flared up: ENTERING (C) HAT MODE

The line zipped up the screen. Then words spelled out in 80-column, glowing bright green. WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON THIS LINE??

SORRY, Turner typed.

ENTER YOUR PASSWORD:

Turner thought fast. He had blundered into the Brunei underground net. He'd known it was possible, since he was using the pre-rigged pay-phone downstairs. MAPLE SYRUP, he typed at random.

CHECKING. . . . THAT IS NOT A VALID PASSWORD.

SIGNING OFF, Turner typed.

WAIT, said the screen. WE DON'T TAKE LURKERS LIGHTLY HERE. WE HAVE BEEN WATCHING YOU. THIS IS THE SECOND TIME YOU HAVE ACCESSED A SATELLITE. WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN OUR NET??

Turner rested one finger on the off switch.

More words spilled out. WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE, "MAPLE SYRUP." YOU ARE TURNER CHONG.

"Turner *Choi*," Turner said aloud. Then he remembered the man who

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had made that mistake. He felt a sudden surge of glee. He typed: OKAY, YOU'VE GOT ME—TUAN COUNCILOR JIMMY BROOKE!

There was a long blank space. Then: CLEVER, Brooke typed. SERIA TOLD YOU. SERIA, ARE YOU ON THIS LINE??

I WANT HER NUMBER!! Turner typed at once.

THEN LEAVE A (M)ESSAGE FOR "GAMELAN ROCKER," Brooke typed. I AM "NET HEADHUNTER."

THANKS, Turner typed.

I'LL LOG YOU ON, MAPLE SYRUP. SINCE YOU'RE ALREADY IN, YOU'D BETTER BE IN ON OUR TERMS. BUT JUST REMEMBER: THIS IS OUR ELECTRIC KAMPONG, SO YOU LIVE BY OUR RULES. OUR "ADAT," OKAY?

I'LL REMEMBER, SIR.

AND NO MORE BOOTLEG SATELLITE LINKS, YOU'RE SCREWING UP OUR GROUND LINES.

OKAY, Turner typed.

YOU CAN RENT TIME ON OUR OWN DISHES. NEXT TIME CALL 85-1515 DIRECTLY. OUR GAMES SECTION COULD USE SOME UPLOADS, BY THE WAY.

The words flashed off, replaced by the neatly ranked commands of a computer bulletin board. Turner accessed the message section, but then sat sweating and indecisive. In his mind, his quick message to Seria was rapidly ramifying into a particularly touchy and tentative love letter.

This was good, but it wasn't how he'd planned it. He was getting in over his head. He'd have to think it through.

He logged off the board. Doris's face appeared at once. "Where the hell have you been, man?"

"Sorry," Turner said.

"I've found you some old geezer out in Yorktown Heights," she said. "He says he used to work with Big Blue back in prehistory."

"It's always some old geezer," Turner said in resignation.

Doris shrugged. "Whaddya expect, man? Birth control got everybody else."

Down in the yard, the sultan of Brunei chatted with his minister as technicians in sarongs and rubber sandals struggled with their huge, ancient cameras. The sultan wore his full regalia, a high-collared red military jacket with gold-braided shoulderboards, heavy with medals and pins. He was an elderly Malay with a neatly clipped white mustache and sad, wise eyes.

His son, the crown prince, had a silk ascot and an air force pilot's jacket. Turner had heard that the prince was nuts about helicopters. Seria's formal wear looked like a jazzed-up Girl Guide's outfit, with a prim creased skirt and a medal-clustered shoulder-sash.

Turner was alone in the programming room, double-checking one of

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the canned routines he's downloaded from America. They'd done wonders for the plant already; the robots had completed one hull of the trimaran. The human crew was handling the delicate work: the glassed-in greenhouse. Braced sections of glass now hung from ceiling pulleys, gleaming photogenically in geodesic wooden frames.

Turner studied his screen.

```
IF QMONITOR(FMONS(2)) EQ 0 THEN RETURN('TOO SMALL')
TOGO = GRIPPER-OPENING + MIN-OFS-QPOSITION(GRIPPER)
DMOVE(XYZ#⟨GRIPPER⟩, (-TOGO/2*HANDFRAME) (2,2))#⟨TOGO⟩,FMONS(2));
```

This was more like it! Despite its low-powered crudity, AML was becoming obsessive with him, its rhythms sticking like poetry. He picked up his coffee-cup, thinking: REACH-GRASP-TOGO = (MOUTH) + SIP; RETURN.

The sluggishness of Brunei had vanished overnight once he'd hooked to the Net. The screen had eaten up his life. A month had passed since his first bootleg run. All day he worked on AML; at night he went home to trade electronic mail with Seria.

Their romance had grown through the Net; not through modern video, but through the ancient bulletin board's anonymous green text. Day by day it became more intense, for it was all kept in a private section of memory, and nothing could be taken back. There were over a hundred messages on their secret disks, starting coolly and teasingly, and working slowly up through real passion to a kind of mutual panic.

They hadn't planned it to happen like this. It was part of the dynamic of the Net. For Seria, it had been a rare chance to escape her role and talk to an interesting stranger. Turner was only looking for the kind of casual feminine solace that had never been hard to find. The Net had tricked them.

Because they couldn't see each other. Turner realized now that no woman had ever known and understood him as Seria did, for the simple reason that he had never had to talk to one so much. If things had gone as they were meant to in the West, he thought, they would have chased their attraction into bed and killed it there. Their two worlds would have collided bruisingly, and they would have smiled over the orange juice next morning and mumbled tactful goodbyes.

But that wasn't how it had happened. Over the weeks, it had all come pouring out between them: his family, her family, their resentment, his loneliness, her petty constraints, all those irritants that ulcerate a single person, but are soothed by two. Bizarrely, they had more in common than he could have ever expected. Real things, things that mattered.

The painfully simple local Net filtered human relations down to a single channel of printed words, leaving only a high-flown Platonic essence. Their relationship had grown into a classic, bloodless, spiritual romance in its most intense and dangerous sense. Human beings weren't

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meant to live such roles. It was the stuff of high drama because it could very easily drive you crazy.

He had waited on tenterhooks for her visit to the shipyard. It had taken a month instead of two weeks, but he'd expected as much. That was the way of Brunei.

"Hello, Maple Syrup."

Turner started violently and stood up. "Seria!"

She threw herself into his arms with a hard thump. He staggered back, hugging her. "No kissing," she said hastily. "Ugh, it's nasty."

He glanced down at the shipyard and hauled her quickly out of sight of the window. "How'd you get up here?"

"I sneaked up the stairs. They're not looking. I had to see you. The real you, not just words on a screen."

"This is crazy." He lifted her off the ground, squeezing her hard. "God, you feel wonderful."

"So do you. Ouch, my medals, be careful."

He set her back down. "We've got to do better than this. Look, where can I see you?"

She gripped his hands feverishly. "Finish the boat, Turner. Brooke wants it, his new toy. Maybe we can arrange something." She pulled his shirt tail out and ran her hands over his midriff. Turner felt a rush of arousal so intense that his ears rang. He reached down and ran his hand up the back of her thigh. "Don't wrinkle my skirt!" she said, trembling. "I have to go on camera!"

Turner said, "This place is nowhere. It isn't right for you, you need fast cars and daiquiris and television and jet trips to the goddamn Bahamas."

"So romantic," she whispered hotly. "Like rock stars, Turner. Huge stacks of amps and mobs at the airport. Turner, if you could see what I'm wearing under this, you'd go crazy."

She turned her face away. "Stop trying to kiss me! You Westerners are weird. Mouths are for eating."

"You've got to get used to Western things, precious."

"You can't take me away, Turner. My people wouldn't let you."

"We'll think of something. Maybe Brooke can help."

"Even Brooke can't leave," she said. "All his money's here. If he tried, they would freeze his funds. He'd be penniless."

"Then I'll stay here," he said recklessly. "Sooner or later we'll have our chance."

"And give up all your money, Turner?"

He shrugged. "You know I don't want it."

She smiled sadly. "You tell me that now, but wait till you see your real world again."

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"No, listen—"

Lights flashed on in the yard.

"I have to go, they'll miss me. Let go, let go." She pulled free of him with vast, tearing reluctance. Then she turned and ran.

In the days that followed, Turner worked obsessively, linking subroutines like data tinkertoys, learning as he went along, adding each day's progress to the master program. Once it was all done, and he had weeded out the redundance, it would be self-sustaining. The robots would take over, transforming information into boats. He would be through. And his slow days in Brunei would be history.

After his job, he'd vaguely planned to go to Tokyo, for a sentimental visit to Kyocera corporate headquarters. He'd been recruited through the Net; he'd never actually seen anyone from Kyocera in the flesh.

That was standard practice. Kyocera's true existence was as data, not as real estate. A modern multinational company was not its buildings or its stock. Its real essence was its ability to pop up on a screen, and to funnel that special information known as money through the global limbo of electronic banking.

He'd never given this a second thought. It was old hat. But filtering both work and love-life through the screen had left him feeling Net-burned. He took to long morning walks through Brunei Town after marathon sessions at the screen, stretching cramped muscles and placing his feet with a dazed AML deliberation: TOGO = DMOVE(KNEE) + QPOSITION(FOOT).

He felt ghostlike in the abandoned streets; Brunei had no nightlife to speak of, and a similar lack of muggers and predators. Everybody was in everyone else's lap, doing each other's laundry, up at dawn to the shrieks of *kampong* roosters. People gossipped about you if you were a mugger. Pretty soon you'd have nightsoil duty and have to eat bruised mangos.

When the rain caught him, as it often did in the early morning, he would take shelter in the corner bus stations. The bus stops were built of tall glass tubes, aquaculture cylinders, murky green soups full of algae and fat, sluggish carp.

He would think about staying then, sheltered in Brunei forever, like a carp behind warm glass. Like one of those little bonsai trees in its cramped and cosy little pot, with people always watching over you, trimming you to fit. That was Brunei for you: the whole East, really: wonderful community, but people always underfoot and in your face. . . .

But was the West any better? Old people locked away in bursting retirement homes . . . Soaring unemployment, with no one knowing when some robot or expert system would make him obsolete . . . People

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talking over televisions when they didn't know the face of the man next door. . . .

Could he really give up the West, he wondered, abandon his family, ruin his career? It was the craziest sort of romantic gesture, he thought, because even if he was brave or stupid enough to break all the rules, she wouldn't. Seria would never escape her *adat*. Being royalty was worse than Triad.

A maze of plans spun through his head like an error-trapping loop, always coming up empty. He would sit dazedly and watch the fish circle in murky water, feeling like a derelict, and wondering if he was losing his mind.

Privy Councilor Brooke bought the boat. He showed up suddenly at the shipyard one afternoon, with his claque of followers. They'd brought a truckload of saplings in tubs of dirt. They began at once to load them aboard the greenhouse, clumping up and down the stepladders to the varnished deck.

Brooke oversaw the loading for a while, checking a deck plan from the pocket of his white silk jacket. Then he jerked his thumb at the glassed-in front of the data center. "Let's go upstairs for a little talk, Turner."

Mercifully, Brooke had brought his hearing aid. They sat in two of the creaking, musty swivel-chairs. "It's a good ship," Brooke said.

"Thanks."

"I knew it would be. It was my idea, you know."

Turner poured coffee. "It figures," he said.

Brooke cackled. "You think it's a crazy notion, don't you? Using robots to build tubs out of cheap glue and scrubwood. But your head's on backwards, boy. You engineers are all mystics. Always goosing God with some new Tower of Babel. Masters of nature, masters of space and time. Aim at the stars, and hit London."

Turner scowled. "Look, Tuan Councilor, I did my job. Nothing in the contract says I have to share your politics."

"No," Brooke said. "But the sultanate could use a man like you. You're a *bricoleur*, Chong. You can make do. You can retrofit. That's what *bricolage* is—it's using the clutter and rubble to make something worth having. Brunei's too poor now to start over with fresh clean plans. We've got nothing but the junk the West conned us into buying, every last bloody Coke can and two-car garage. And now we have to live in the rubble, and make it a community. It's a tough job, *bricolage*. It takes a special kind of man, a special eye, to make the ruins bloom."

"Not me," Turner said. He was in one of his tough-minded moods. Something about Brooke made him leery. Brooke had a peculiar covert

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sleaziness about him. It probably came from a lifetime of evading drug laws.

And Turner had been expecting this final push; people in his *kampong* had been dropping hints for weeks. They didn't want him to leave; they were always dropping by with pathetic little gifts. "This place is one big hothouse," he said. "Your little *kampongs* are like orchids, they can only grow under glass. Brunei's already riddled with the Net. Someday it'll break open your glass bubble, and let the rest of the world in. Then a hard rain's gonna fall."

Brooke stared. "You like Bob Dylan?"

"Who?" Turner said, puzzled.

Brooke, confused, sipped his coffee, and grimaced. "You've been drinking this stuff? Jesus, no wonder you never sleep."

Turner glowered at him. Nobody in Brunei could mind their own business. Eyes were everywhere, with tongues to match. "You already know my real trouble."

"Sure." Brooke smiled with a yellowed gleam of dentures. "I have this notion that I'll sail upriver, lad. A little shakedown cruise for a couple of days. I could use a technical adviser, if you can mind your manners around royalty."

Turner's heart leapt. He smiled shakily. "Then I'm your man, Councilor."

They bashed a bottle of nonalcoholic grape juice across the center bow and christened the ship the *Mambo Sun*. Turner's work crew launched her down the rails and stepped the masts. She was crewed by a family of Dayaks from one of the offshore rigs, an old woman with four sons. They were the dark, beautiful descendants of headhunting pirates, dressed in hand-dyed sarongs and ancient plastic baseball caps. Their language was utterly incomprehensible.

The *Mambo Sun* rode high in the water, settling down into her new element with weird drumlike creaks from the hollow hulls. They put out to sea in a stiff offshore breeze.

Brooke stood with spry insouciance under the towering jib sail, snorting at the sea air. "She'll do twelve knots," he said with satisfaction. "Lord, Turner, it's great to be out of the penthouse and away from that crowd of flacks."

"Why do you put up with them?"

"It comes with the money, lad. You should know that."

Turner said nothing. Brooke grinned at him knowingly. "Money's power, my boy. Power doesn't go away. If you don't use it yourself, someone else will use you to get it."

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"I hear they've trapped you here with that money," Turner said. "They'll freeze your funds if you try to leave."

"I let them trap me," Brooke said. "That's how I won their trust." He took Turner's arm. "But you let me know if you have money troubles here. Don't let the local Islamic Bank fast-talk you into anything. Come see me first."

Turner shrugged him off. "What good has it done you? You're surrounded with yes-men."

"I've had my crew for forty years." Brooke sighed nostalgically. "Besides, you should have seen them in '98, when the streets were full of Moslem fanatics screaming for blood. Molotovs burning everywhere, pitched battles with the blessed Chinese, the sultan held hostage. . . . My crew didn't turn a hair. Held the mob off like a crowd of teenyboppers when they tried to rush my building. They had grit, those lads."

An ancient American helicopter buzzed overhead, its orange seafloats almost brushing the mast. Brooke yelled to the crew in their odd language; they furled the sails and set anchor, half a mile offshore. The chopper wheeled expertly and settled down in a shimmering circle of wind-flattened water. One of the Dayaks threw them a weighted line.

They hauled in. "Permission to come aboard, sir!" said the crown prince. He and Seria wore crisp nautical whites. They clambered from the float up a rope ladder and onto the deck. The third passenger, a pilot, took the controls. The crew hauled anchor and set sail again; the chopper lifted off.

The prince shook Turner's hand. "You know my sister, I believe."

"We met at the filming," Turner said.

"Ah yes. Good footage, that."

Brooke, with miraculous tact, lured the prince into the greenhouse. Seria immediately flung herself into Turner's arms. "You haven't written in two days," she hissed.

"I know," Turner said. He looked around quickly to make sure the Dayaks were occupied. "I keep thinking about Vancouver. How I'll feel when I'm back there."

"How you left your Sleeping Beauty behind in the castle of thorns? You're such a romantic, Turner."

"Don't talk like that. It hurts."

She smiled. "I can't help being cheerful. We have two days together, and Omar gets seasick."

The river flowed beneath their hulls like thin gray grease. Jungle leaned in from the banks; thick, clotted green mats of foliage over skinny, light-starved trunks, rank with creepers. It was snake country, leech country, a primeval reek stewing in deadly humidity, with air so thick

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that the raucous shrieks of birds seemed to cut it like ripsaws. Bugs whirled in dense mating swarms over rafts of slime. Suspicious, sodden logs loomed in the gray mud. Some logs had scales and eyes.

The valley was as crooked as an artery, snaking between tall hills smothered in poisonous green. Sluggish wads of mist wreathed their tops. Where the trees failed, sheer cliffs were shrouded in thick ripples of ivy. The sky was gray, the sun a muddy glow behind tons of haze.

The wind died, and Brooke fired up the ship's tiny alcohol engine. Turner stood on the central bow as they sputtered upstream. He felt glazed and dreamy. Culture shock had seized him; none of it seemed real. It felt like television. Reflexively, he kept thinking of Vancouver, sailboat trips out to clean pine islands.

Seria and the prince joined him on the bow. "Lovely, isn't it?" said the prince. "We've made it a game preserve. Someday there will be tigers again."

"Good thinking, Your Highness," Turner said.

"The city feeds itself, you know. A lot of the old paddies and terraces have gone back to jungle." The prince smiled with deep satisfaction.

With evening, they tied up at a dock by the ruins of a riverine city. Decades earlier, a flood had devastated the town, leaving shattered walls, where vines snaked up trellises of rusting reinforcement rods. A former tourist hotel was now a ranger station.

They all went ashore to review the troops: Royal Malay Rangers in jungle camo, and a visiting crew of Swedish ecologists from the World Wildlife Fund. The two aristocrats were gung-ho for a bracing hike through the jungle. They chatted amiably with the Swedes as they soaked themselves with gnat and leech repellent. Brooke pleaded his age, and Turner managed to excuse himself.

Behind the city rose a soaring radio aerial and the rain-blotched white domes of satellite dishes.

"Jamming equipment," said Brooke with a wink. "The sultanate set it up years ago. Islamic, Malaysian, Japanese—you'd be surprised how violently people insist on being listened to."

"Freedom of speech," Turner said.

"How free is it when only rich nations can afford to talk? The Net's expensive, Turner. To you it's a way of life, but for us it's just a giant megaphone for Coca-Cola. We built this to block the shouting of the outside world. It seemed best to set the equipment here in the ruins, out of harm's way. This is a good place to hide secrets." Brooke sighed. "You know how the corruption spreads. Anyone who touches it is tempted. We use these dishes as the nerve center of our own little Net. You can get a line out here—a real one, with video. Come along, Turner. I'll stand Maple Syrup a free call to civilization, if you like."

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They walked through leaf-littered streets, where pigs and lean, lizard-eyed chickens scattered from underfoot. Turner saw a tattooed face, framed in headphones, at a shattered second-story window. "The local Murut tribe," Brooke said, glancing up. "They're a bit shy."

The central control room was a small white concrete blockhouse surrounded by sturdy solar-panel racks. Brooke opened a tarnished padlock with a pocket key, and shot the bolt. Inside, the windowless blockhouse was faintly lit by the tiny green and yellow power-lights of antique disk drives and personal computers. Brooke flicked on a desk lamp and sat on a chair cushioned with moldy foam rubber. "All automated, you see? The government hasn't had to pay an official visit in years. It keeps everyone out of trouble."

"Except for your insiders," Turner said.

"We *are* trouble," said Brooke. "Besides, this was my idea in the first place." He opened a musty wicker chest and pulled a video camera from a padded wrapping of cotton batik. He popped it open, sprayed its insides with silicone lubricant, and propped it on a tripod. "All the comforts of home." He left the blockhouse.

Turner hesitated. He'd finally realized what had bothered him about Brooke. Brooke was *hip*. He had that classic hip attitude of being in on things denied to the uncool. It was amazing how sleazy and suspicious it looked on someone who was *really old*.

Turner dialed his brother's house. The screen remained dark. "Who is it?" Georgie said.

"Turner."

"Oh." A long moment passed; the screen flashed on to show Georgie in a maroon silk houserobe, his hair still flattened from the pillow. "That's a relief. We've been having some trouble with phone flashers."

"How are things?"

"He's dying, Turner."

Turner stared. "Good God."

"I'm glad you called." Georgie smoothed his hair shakily. "How soon can you get here?"

"I've got a job here, Georgie."

Georgie frowned. "Look, I don't blame you for running. You wanted to live your own life; okay, that's fine. But this is *family business*, not some two-bit job in the middle of nowhere."

"Goddammit," Turner said, pleading, "I *like* it here, Georgie."

"I know how much you hate the old bastard. But he's just a dying old man now. Look, we hold his hands for a couple of weeks, and it's all ours, understand? The Riviera, man."

"It won't work, Georgie," Turner said, clutching at straws. "He's going to screw us."

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"That's why I need you here. We've got to double-team him, understand?" Georgie glared from the screen. "Think of my kids, Turner. We're your family, you owe us."

Turner felt growing despair. "Georgie, there's a woman here . . ."

"Christ, Turner."

"She's not like the others. Really."

"Great. So you're going to marry this girl, right? Raise kids."

"Well . . ."

"Then what are you wasting my time for?"

"Okay," Turner said, his shoulders slumping. "I gotta make arrangements. I'll call you back."

The Dayaks had gone ashore. The prince blithely invited the Swedish ecologists on board. They spent the evening chastely sipping orange juice and discussing Krakatoa and the swamp rhinoceros.

After the party broke up, Turner waited a painful hour and crept into the deserted greenhouse.

Seria was waiting in the sweaty green heat, sitting cross-legged in watery moonlight crosshatched by geodesics, brushing her hair. Turner joined her on the mat. She wore an erotic red synthetic nightie (some groupie's heirloom from the legion of Brooke's women), crisp with age. She was drenched in perfume.

Turner touched her fingers to the small lump on his forearm, where a contraceptive implant showed beneath his skin. He kicked his jeans off.

They began in caution and silence, and ended, two hours later, in the primeval intimacy of each other's musk and sweat. Turner lay on his back, with her head pillowed on his bare arm, feeling a sizzling effervescence of deep, cellular pleasure.

It had been mystical. He felt as if some primal feminine energy had poured off her body and washed through him, to the bone. Everything seemed different now. He had discovered a new world, the kind of world a man could spend a lifetime in. It was worth ten years of a man's life just to lie here and smell her skin.

The thought of having her out of arm's reach, even for a moment, filled him with a primal anxiety close to pain. There must be a million ways to make love, he thought languidly. As many as there are to talk or think. With passion. With devotion. Playfully, tenderly, frantically, soothingly. Because you want to, because you need to.

He felt an instinctive urge to retereat to some snug den—anywhere with a bed and a roof—and spend the next solid week exploring the first twenty or thirty ways in that million.

But then the insistent pressure of reality sent a trickle of reason into

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him. He drifted out of reverie with a stabbing conviction of the perversity of life. Here was all he wanted—all he asked was to pull her over him like a blanket and shut out life's pointless complications. And it wasn't going to happen.

He listened to her peaceful breathing and sank into black depression. This was the kind of situation that called for wild romantic gestures, the kind that neither of them were going to make. They weren't allowed to make them. They weren't in his program, they weren't in her *adat*, they weren't in the plans.

Once he'd returned to Vancouver, none of this would seem real. Jungle moonlight and erotic sweat didn't mix with cool piny fogs over the mountains and the family mansion in Churchill Street. Culture shock would rip his memories away, snapping the million invisible threads that bind lovers.

As he drifted toward sleep, he had a sudden lucid flash of precognition: himself, sitting in the back seat of his brother's Mercedes, letting the machine drive him randomly around the city. Looking past his reflection in the window at the clotted snow in Queen Elizabeth Park, and thinking: *I'll never see her again.*

It seemed only an instant later that she was shaking him awake. "Shh!"

"What?" he mumbled.

"You were talking in your sleep." She nuzzled his ear, whispering. "What does 'Set-position Q-move' mean?"

"Jesus," he whispered back. "I was dreaming in AML." He felt the last fading trail of nightmare then, some unspeakable horror of cold iron and helpless repetition. "My family," he said. "They were all robots."

She giggled.

"I was trying to repair my grandfather."

"Go back to sleep, darling."

"No." He was wide awake now. "We'd better get back."

"I hate that cabin. I'll come to your tent on deck."

"No, they'll find out. You'll get hurt, Seria." He stepped back into his jeans.

"I don't care. This is the only time we'll have." She struggled fretfully into the red tissue of her nightie.

"I want to be with you," he said. "If you could be mine, I'd say to hell with my job and my family."

She smiled bitterly. "You'll think better of it, later. You can't throw away your life for the sake of some affair. You'll find some other woman in Vancouver. I wish I could kill her."

Every word rang true, but he still felt hurt. She shouldn't have doubted

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his willingness to totally destroy his life. "You'll marry too, someday. For reasons of state."

"I'll never marry," she said aloofly. "Someday I'll run away from all this. My grand romantic gesture."

She would never do it, he thought with a kind of aching pity. She'll grow old under glass in this place. "One grand gesture was enough," he said. "At least we had this much."

She watched him gloomily. "Don't be sorry you're leaving, darling. It would be wrong of me to let you stay. You don't know all the truth about this place. Or about my family."

"All families have secrets. Yours can't be any worse than mine."

"My family is different." She looked away. "Malay royalty are sacred, Turner. Sacred and unclean. We are aristocrats, shields for the innocent . . . Dirt and ugliness strikes the shield, not our people. We take corruption on ourselves. Any crimes the State commits are our crimes, understand? They belong to our family."

Turner blinked. "Well, what? Tell me, then. Don't let it come between us."

"You're better off not knowing. We came here for a reason, Turner. It's a plan of Brooke's."

"That old fraud?" Turner said, smiling. "You're too romantic about Westerners, Seria. He looks like hot stuff to you, but he's just a burnt-out crackpot."

She shook her head. "You don't understand. It's different in your West." She hugged her slim legs and rested her chin on her knee. "Someday I will get out."

"No," Turner said, "it's *here* that it's different. In the West families disintegrate, money pries into everything. People don't belong to each other there, they belong to money and their institutions . . . Here at least people really care and watch over each other . . ."

She gritted her teeth. "Watching. Yes, always. You're right, I have to go."

He crept back through the mosquito netting of his tent on deck, and sat in the darkness for hours, savoring his misery. Tomorrow the prince's helicopter would arrive to take the prince and his sister back to the city. Soon Turner would return as well, and finish the last details, and leave. He played out a fantasy: cruising back from Vanc with a fat cashier's check. Tea with the sultan. *Er, look, Your Highness, my granddad made it big in the heroin trade, so here's two mill. Just pack the girl up in excelsior, she'll love it as an engineer's wife, believe me. . . .*

He heard the faint shuffle of footsteps against the deck. He peered through the tentflap, saw the shine of a flashlight. It was Brooke. He was carrying a valise.

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The old man looked around surreptitiously and crept down over the side, to the dock. Weakened by hours of brooding, Turner was instantly inflamed by Brooke's deviousness. Turner sat still for a moment, while curiosity and misplaced fury rapidly devoured his common sense. Common sense said Brunei's secrets were none of his business, but common sense was making his life hell. Anything was better than staying awake all night wondering. He struggled quickly into shirt and jeans and boots.

He crept over the side, spotted Brooke's white suit in a patch of moonlight, and followed him. Brooke skirted the edge of the ruins, and took a trail into the jungle, full of ominous vines and the promise of snakes. Beneath a spongy litter of leaves and moss, the trail was asphalt. It had been a highway, once.

Turner shadowed Brooke closely, realizing gratefully that the deaf old man couldn't hear the crunching of his boots. The trail led uphill, into the interior. Brooke cursed goodnaturedly as a group of grunting hogs burst across the trail. Half a mile later he rested for ten long minutes in the rusting hulk of a Land Rover, while vicious gnats feasted on Turner's exposed neck and hands.

They rounded a hill and came across an encampment. Faint moonlight glittered off twelve-foot barbed wire and four dark watchtowers. The undergrowth had been burned back for yards around. There were barracks inside.

Brooke walked nonchalantly to the gate. The place looked dead. Turner crept nearer, sheltered by darkness.

The gate opened. Turner crawled forward between two bushes, craning his neck.

A watchtower spotlight clacked on and framed him in dazzling light from forty yards away. Someone shouted at him through a bullhorn, in Malay. Turner lurched to his feet, blinded, and put his hands high. "Don't shoot!" he yelled, his voice cracking. "Hold your fire!"

The light flickered out. Turner stood blinking in darkness, then watched four little red fireflies crawling across his chest. He realized what they were and reached higher, his spine icy. Those little red fireflies were laser sights for automatic rifles.

The guards were on him before his eyesight cleared. Dim forms in jungle camo. He saw the wicked angular magazines of their rifles, leveled at his chest. Their heads were bulky: they wore night-sight goggles.

They handcuffed him and hustled him forward toward the camp. "You guys speak English?" Turner said. No answer. "I'm a Canadian, okay?"

Brooke waited, startled, beyond the gate. "Oh," he said. "It's you. What sort of dumbshit idea was this, Turner?"

"A really bad one," Turner said sincerely.

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Brooke spoke to the guards in Malay. They lowered their guns; one freed his hands. They stalked off unerringly back into the darkness.

"What *is* this place?" Turner said.

Brooke turned his flashlight on Turner's face. "What does it look like, jerk? It's a political prison." His voice was so cold from behind the glare that Turner saw, in his mind's eye, the sudden flash of a telegram. DEAR MADAM CHOI, REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON STEPPED ON A VIPER IN THE JUNGLES OF BORNEO AND YOUR BOOTS DIDN'T SAVE HIM. . . .

Brooke spoke quietly. "Did you think Brunei was all sweetness and light? It's a nation, damn it, not your toy train set. All right, stick by me and keep your mouth shut."

Brooke waved his flashlight. A guard emerged from the darkness and led them around the corner of the wooden barracks, which was set above the damp ground on concrete blocks. They walked up a short flight of steps. The guard flicked an exterior switch and the cell inside flashed into harsh light. The guard peered through close-set bars in the heavy ironbound door, then unlocked it with a creak of hinges.

Brooke murmured thanks and carefully shook the guard's hand. The guard smiled below the ugly goggles and slipped his hand inside his camo jacket.

"Come on," Brooke said. They stepped into the cell. The door clanked shut behind them.

A dark-skinned old man was blinking wearily in the sudden light. He sat up in his iron cot and brushed aside yellowed mosquito netting, reaching for a pair of wire-rimmed spectacles on the floor. He wore gray-striped prison canvas: drawstring trousers and a rough, buttoned blouse. He slipped the spectacles carefully over his ears and looked up. "Ah," he said. "Jimmy."

It was a bare cell: wooden floor, a chamberpot, a battered aluminum pitcher and basin. Two wire shelves above the bed held books in English and a curlicued alphabet Turner didn't recognize.

"This is Dr. Vikram Moratuwa," Brooke said. "The founder of the Partai Ekolojasi. This is Turner Choi, a prying young idiot."

"Ah," said Moratuwa. "Are we to be cellmates, young man?"

"He's not under arrest," Brooke said. "Yet." He opened his valise. "I brought you the books."

"Excellent," said Moratuwa, yawning. He had lost most of his teeth. "Ah, Mumford, Florman, and Lévi-Strauss. Thank you, Jimmy."

"I think it's okay," Brooke said, noticing Turner's stricken look. "The sultan winks at these little charity visits, if I'm discreet. I think I can talk you out of trouble, even though you put your foot in it."

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"Jimmy is my oldest friend in Brunei," said Moratuwa. "There is no harm in two old men talking."

"Don't you believe it," Brooke said. "This man is a dangerous radical. He wanted to dissolve the monarchy. And him a privy councilor, too."

"Jimmy, we did not come here to be aristocrats. That is not Right Action."

Turner recognized the term. "You're a Buddhist?"

"Yes. I was with Sarvodaya Shramadana, the Buddhist technological movement. Jimmy and I met in Sri Lanka, where the Sarvodaya was born."

"Sri Lanka's a nice place to do videos," Brooke said. "I was still in the rock biz then, doing production work. Finance. But it was getting stale. Then I dropped in on a Sarvodaya rally, heard him speak. It was damned exciting!" Brooke grinned at the memory. "He was in trouble there, too. Even thirty years ago, his preaching was a little too pure for anyone's comfort."

"We were not put on this earth to make things comfortable for ourselves," Moratuwa chided. He glanced at Turner. "Brunei flourishes now, young man. We have the techniques, the expertise, the experience. It is time to fling open the doors and let Right Action spread to the whole earth! Brunei was our greenhouse, but the fields are the greater world outside."

Brooke smiled. "Choi is building the boats."

"Our Ocean Arks?" said Moratuwa. "Ah, splendid."

"I sailed here today on the first model."

"What joyful news. You have done us a great service, Mr. Choi."

"I don't understand," Turner said. "They're just sailboats."

Brooke smiled. "To you, maybe. But imagine you're a Malaysian dock worker living on fish meal and single-cell protein. What're you gonna think of a ship that costs nothing to build, nothing to run, and gives away free food?"

"Oh," said Turner slowly.

"Your sailboats will carry our Green message around the globe," Moratuwa said. "We teachers have a saying: 'I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand.' Mere preaching is only words. When people see our floating *kampongs* tied up at docks around the world, then they can touch and smell and live our life aboard those ships, then they will truly understand our Way."

"You really think that'll work?" Turner said.

"That is how we started here," Moratuwa said. "We had textbooks on the urban farm, textbooks developed in your own West, simple technologies anyone can use. Jimmy's building was our first Green *kampong*, our demonstration model. We found many to help us. Unemployment

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was severe, as it still is throughout the world. But idle hands can put in skylights, haul nightsoil, build simple windmills. It is not elegant, but it is food and community and pride."

"It was a close thing between our Partai and the Moslem extremists," Brooke said. "They wanted to burn every trace of the West—we wanted to retrofit. We won. People could see and touch the future we offered. Food tastes better than preaching."

"Yes, those poor Moslem fellows," said Moratuwa. "Still here after so many years. You must talk to the sultan about an amnesty, Jimmy."

"They shot his brother in front of his family," Brooke said. "Seria saw it happen. She was only a child."

Turner felt a spasm of pain for her. She had never told him.

But Moratuwa shook his head. "The royals went too far in protecting their power. They tried to bottle up our Way, to control it with their royal *adat*. But they cannot lock out the world forever, and lock up those who want fresh air. They only imprison themselves. Ask your Seria." He smiled. "Buddha was a prince also, but he left his palace when the world called out."

Brooke laughed sourly. "Old troublemakers are stubborn." He looked at Turner. "This man's still loyal to our old dream, all that wild-eyed stuff that's buried under twenty years. He could be out of here with a word, if he promised to be cool and follow the *adat*. It's a crime to keep him in here. But the royal family aren't saints, they're politicians. They can't afford the luxury of innocence."

Turner thought it through, sadly. He realized now that he had found the ghost behind those huge old Green Party wallposters, those peeling Whole Earth sermons buried under sports ads and Malay movie stars. This was the man who had saved Seria's family—and this was where they had put him. "The sultan's not very grateful," Turner said.

"That's not the problem. You see, my friend here doesn't really give a damn about Brunei. He wants to break the greenhouse doors off, and never mind the trouble to the locals. He's not satisfied to save one little postage-stamp country. He's got the world on his conscience."

Moratuwa smiled indulgently. "And my friend Jimmy has the world in his computer terminal. He is a wicked Westerner. He has kept the simple natives pure, while he is drenched in whiskey and the Net."

Brooke winced. "Yeah. Neither one of us really belongs here. We're both goddamn outside agitators, is all. We came here together. His words, my money—we thought we could change things everywhere. Brunei was going to be our laboratory. Brunei was just small enough, and desperate enough, to listen to a couple of crackpots." He tugged at his hearing aid and glared at Turner's smile. "You're no prize either, Choi. Y'know, I was wrong about you. I'm glad you're leaving."

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"Why?" Turner said, hurt.

"You're too straight, and you're too much trouble. I checked you out through the Net a long time ago—I know all about your granddad the smack merchant and all that Triad shit. I thought you'd be cool. Instead you had to be the knight in shining armor—bloody robot, that's what you are."

Turner clenched his fists. "Sorry I didn't follow your program, you old bastard."

"She's like a daughter to me," Brooke said. "A quick bump-and-grind, okay, we all need it, but you had to come on like Prince Charming. Well, you're getting on that chopper tomorrow, and it's back to Babylon for you, kid."

"Yeah?" Turner said defiantly. "Or else, huh? You'd put me in this place?"

Brooke shook his head. "I won't have to. Think it over, Mr. Choi. You know damn well where you belong."

It was a grim trip back. Seria caught his mood at once. When she saw his bad cop scowl, her morning-after smile died like a moth in a killing bottle. She knew it was over. They didn't say much. The roar of the copter blades would have drowned it anyway.

The shipyard was crammed with the framework of a massive Ocean Ark. It had been simple to scale the process up with the programs he'd downloaded. The work crew was overjoyed, but Turner's long-expected triumph had turned to ashes for him. He printed out a letter of resignation and took it to the minister of industry.

The minister's *kampong* was still expanding. They had webbed off a whole city block under great tent-like sheets of translucent plastic, which hung from the walls of tall buildings like giant dew-soaked spiderwebs. Women and children were casually ripping up the streets with picks and hoes, revealing long-smothered topsoil. The sewers had been grubbed up and diverted into long troughs choked with watercress.

The minister lived in a long flimsy tent of cotton batik. He was catching an afternoon snooze in a woven hammock anchored to a high-rise wall and strung to an old lamp post.

Turner woke him up.

"I see," the minister yawned, slipping on his sandals. "Illness in the family, is it? You have my sympathies. When may we expect you back?"

Turner shook his head. "The job's done. Those 'bots will be pasting up ships from now till doomsday."

"But you still have two months to run. You should oversee the line until we're sure we have the beetles out."

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"Bugs," Turner said. "There aren't any." He knew it was true. Building ships that simple was monkey-work. Humans could have done it.

"There's plenty of other work here for a man of your talents."

"Hire someone else."

The minister frowned. "I shall have to complain to Kyocera."

"I'm quitting them, too."

"Quitting your multinational? At this early stage in your career? Is that wise?"

Turner closed his eyes and summoned his last dregs of patience. "Why should I care? Tuan Minister, I've never ever *seen* them."

Turner cut a last deal with the bootleg boys down on Floor 4 and sneaked into his room with an old gas can full of rice beer. The little screen on the end of the nozzle was handy for filtering out the thickest dregs. He poured himself a long one and looked around the room. He had to start packing.

He began stripping the walls and tossing souvenirs onto his bed, pausing to knock back long shuddery glugs of warm rice beer. Packing was painfully easy. He hadn't brought much. The room looked pathetic. He had another beer.

His bonsai tree was dying. There was no doubt of it now. The cramping of its tiny pot was murderous. "You poor little bastard," Turner told it, his voice thick with self-pity. On impulse, he broke its pot with his boot. He carried the tree gently across the room, and buried its gnarled roots in the rich black dirt of the windowbox. "There," he said, wiping his hands on his jeans. "Now *grow*, dammit!"

It was Friday night again. They were showing another free movie down in the park. Turner ignored it and called Vancouver.

"No video again?" Georgie said.

"No."

"I'm glad you called, anyway. It's bad, Turner. The Taipei cousins are here. They're hovering around the old man like a pack of buzzards."

"They're in good company, then."

"Jesus, Turner! Don't say that kind of crap! Look, Honorable Grandfather's been asking about you every day. How soon can you get here?"

Turner looked in his notebook. "I've booked passage on a freighter to Labuan Island. That's Malaysian territory. I can get a plane there, a puddle-jumper to Manila. Then a Japan Air jet to Midway and another to Vanc. That puts me in at, uh, eight P.M. your time Monday."

"Three *days?*

"There are no *planes* here, Georgie."

"All right, if that's the best you can do. It's too bad about this video.

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Look, I want you to call him at the hospital, okay? Tell him you're coming."

"Now?" said Turner, horrified.

Georgie exploded. "I'm sick of doing your explaining, man! Face up to your goddamn obligations, for once! The least you can do is call him and play good boy grandson! I'm gonna call-forward you from here."

"Okay, you're right," Turner said. "Sorry, Georgie, I know it's been a strain."

Georgie looked down and hit a key. White static blurred, a phone rang, and Turner was catapulted to his Grandfather's bedside.

The old man was necrotic. His cheekbones stuck out like wedges, and his lips were swollen and blue. Stacks of monitors blinked beside his bed. Turner spoke in halting Mandarin. "Hello, Grandfather. It's your grandson, Turner. How are you?"

The old man fixed his horrible eyes on the screen. "Where is your picture, boy?"

"This is Borneo, Grandfather. They don't have modern telephones."

"What kind of place is that? Have they no respect?"

"It's politics, Grandfather."

Grandfather Choi scowled. A chill of terror went through Turner. Good God, he thought, I'm going to look like that when I'm old. His grandfather said, "I don't recall giving my permission for this."

"It was just eight months, Grandfather."

"You prefer these barbarians to your own family, is that it?"

Turner said nothing. The silence stretched painfully. "They're not barbarians," he blurted at last.

"What's that, boy?"

Turned switched to English. "They're British Commonwealth, like Hong Kong was. Half of them are Chinese."

Grandfather sneered and followed him to English. "Why they need you, then?"

"They need me," Turner said tightly, "because I'm a trained engineer."

His Grandfather peered at the blank screen. He looked feeble suddenly, confused. He spoke Chinese. "Is this some sort of trick? My son's boy doesn't talk like that. What is that howling I hear?"

The movie was reaching a climax downstairs. Visceral crunches and screaming. It all came boiling up inside Turner then. "What's it sound like, old man? A Triad gang war?"

His grandfather turned pale. "That's it, boy. Is all over for you."

"Great," Turner said, his heart racing. "Maybe we can be honest, just this once."

"My money bought you diapers, boy."

"Fang-pa," Turner said. "Dog's-fart. You made our lives hell with that

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money. You turned my dad into a drunk and my brother into an ass-kisser. That's blood money from junkies and I wouldn't take it if you begged me!"

"You talk big, boy, but you don't show the face," the old man said. He raised one shrunken fist, his bandaged forearm trailing tubes. "If you were here I give you a good beating."

Turner laughed giddily. He felt like a hero. "You old fraud! Go on, give the money to Uncle's kids. They're gonna piss on your altar every day, you stupid old bastard."

"They're good children, not like you."

"They hate your guts, old man. Wise up."

"Yes, they hate me," the old man admitted gloomily. The truth seemed to fill him with grim satisfaction. He nestled his head back into his pillow like a turtle into its shell. "They all want more money, more, more, more. You want it, too, boy, don't lie to me."

"Don't need it," Turner said airily. "They don't use money here."

"Barbarians," his grandfather said. "But you need it when you come home."

"I'm staying here," Turner said. "I *like* it here. I'm free here, understand? Free of the money and free of the family and free of you!"

"Wicked boy," his grandfather said. "I was like you once. I did bad things to be free." He sat up in bed, glowering. "But at least I helped my family."

"I could never be like you," Turner said.

"You wait till they come after you with their hands out," his grandfather said, stretching out one wrinkled palm. "The end of the world couldn't hide you from them."

"What do you mean?"

His grandfather chuckled with an awful satisfaction. "I leave you all the money, Mr. Big Freedom. You see what you do then when you're in my shoes."

"I don't want it!" Turner shouted. "I'll give it all to charity!"

"No you won't," his grandfather said. "You'll think of your duty to your family, like I had to. From now on *you* take care of them, Mr. Runaway, Mr. High and Mighty."

"I won't!" Turner said. "You can't!"

"I'll die happy now," his grandfather said, closing his eyes. He lay back on the pillow and grinned feebly. "It worth it just to see the look on their faces."

"You can't make me!" Turner yelled. "I'll never go back, understand? I'm staying—"

The line went dead.

* * *

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Turner shut down his phone and stowed it away.

He had to talk to Brooke. Brooke would know what to do. Somehow, Turner would play off one old man against the other.

Turner still felt shocked by the turn of events, but beneath his confusion he felt a soaring confidence. At last he had faced down his grandfather. After that, Brooke would be easy. Brooke would find some loophole in the Bruneian government that would protect him from the old man's legacy. Turner would stay safe in Brunei. It was the best place in the world to frustrate the banks of the Global Net.

But Brooke was still on the river, on his boat.

Turner decided to meet Brooke the moment he docked in town. He couldn't wait to tell Brooke about his decision to stay in Brunei for good. He was feverish with excitement. He had wrenched his life out of the program now; everything was different. He saw everything from a fresh new angle, with a *bricoleur's* eyes. His whole life was waiting for a retrofit.

He took the creaking elevator to the ground floor. In the park outside, the movie crowd was breaking up. Turner hitched a ride in the pedicab of some teenagers from a waterfront *kampong*. He took the first shift pedaling, and got off a block away from the dock Brooke used.

The cracked concrete quays were sheltered under a long, rambling roof of tin and geodesic bamboo. Half-a-dozen fishing smacks floated at the docks, beside an elderly harbor dredge. Brooke's first boat, a decrepit pleasure cruiser, was in permanent drydock with its diesel engine in pieces.

The headman of the dock *kampong* was a plump, motherly Malay grandmother. She and her friends were having a Friday night quilting bee, repairing canvas sails under the yellow light of an alcohol lamp.

Brooke was not expected back until morning. Turner was determined to wait him out. He had not asked permission to sleep out from his *kampong,* but after a long series of garbled translations he established that the locals would vouch for him later. He wandered away from the chatter of Malay gossip and found a dark corner.

He fell back on a floury pile of rice bags, watching from the darkness, unable to sleep. Whenever his eyes closed, his brain ran a loud interior monologue, rehearsals for his talk with Brooke.

The women worked on, wrapped in the lamp's mild glow. Innocently, they enjoyed themselves, secure in their usefulness. Yet Turner knew machines could have done the sewing faster and easier. Already, through reflex, as he watched, some corner of his mind pulled the task to computerized pieces, thinking: simplify, analyze, reduce.

But to what end? What was it really for, all that tech he'd learned? He'd become an engineer for reasons of his own. Because it offered a way

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out for him, because the gift for it had always been there in his brain and hands and eyes. . . . Because of the rewards it offered him. Freedom, independence, money, the rewards of the West.

But what control did he have? Rewards could be snatched away without warning. He'd seen others go to the wall when their specialties ran dry. Education and training were no defense. Not today, when a specialist's knowledge could be programmed into a computerized expert system.

Was he really any safer than these Bruneians? A thirty-minute phone call could render these women obsolete—but a society that could do their work with robots would have no use for their sails. Within their little greenhouse, their miniature world of gentle technologies, they had more control than he did.

People in the West talked about the "technical elite"—and Turner knew it was a damned lie. Technology roared on, running full-throttle on the world's last dregs of oil, but no one was at the wheel, not really. Massive institutions, both governments and corporations, fumbled for control, but couldn't understand. They had no hands-on feel for tech and what it meant, for the solid feeling in a good design.

The "technical elite" were errand boys. They didn't decide how to study, what to work on, where they could be most useful, or to what end. Money decided that. Technicians were owned by the abstract ones and zeros in bankers' microchips, paid out by silk-suit hustlers who'd never touched a wrench. Knowledge wasn't power, not really, not for engineers. There were too many abstractions in the way.

But the gift was real—Brooke had told him so, and now Turner realized it was true. That was the reason for engineering. Not for money, because there was more money in shuffling paper. Not for power; that was in management. For the gift itself.

He leaned back in darkness, smelling tar and rice dust. For the first time, he truly felt he understood what he was doing. Now that he had defied his family and his past, he saw his work in a new light. It was something bigger than just his private escape hatch. It was a worthy pursuit on its own merits: a thing of dignity.

It all began to fall into place for him then, bringing with it a warm sense of absolute rightness. He yawned, nestling his head into the burlap.

He would live here and help them. Brunei was a new world, a world built on a human scale, where people mattered. No, it didn't have the flash of a hot CAD-CAM establishment with its tons of goods and reams of printout; it didn't have that technical sweetness and heroic scale.

But it was still good work. A man wasn't a Luddite because he worked for people instead of abstractions. The green technologies demanded *more* intelligence, more reason, more of the engineer's true gift. Because they

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went against the blind momentum of a dead century, with all its rusting monuments of arrogance and waste. . . .

Turner squirmed drowsily into the scrunchy comfort of the rice bags, in the fading grip of his epiphany. Within him, some unspoken knot of division and tension eased, bringing a new and deep relief. As always, just before sleep, his thoughts turned to Seria. Somehow, he would deal with that too. He wasn't sure just how yet, but it could wait. It was different now that he was staying. Everything was working out. He was on a roll.

Just as he drifted off, he half-heard a thrashing scuffle as a *kampong* cat seized and tore a rat behind the bags.

A stevedore shook him awake next morning. They needed the rice. Turner sat up, his mouth gummy with hangover. His T-shirt and jeans were caked with dust.

Brooke had arrived. They were loading provisions aboard his ship: bags of rice, dried fruit, compost fertilizer. Turner, smiling, hoisted a bag over his shoulder and swaggered up the ramp on board.

Brooke oversaw the loading from a canvas deck chair. He was unshaven, nervously picking at a gaudy acoustic guitar. He started violently when Turner dropped the bag at his feet.

"Thank God you're here!" he said. "Get out of sight!" He grabbed Turner's arm and hustled him across the deck into the greenhouse.

Turner stumbled along reluctantly. "What the hell? How'd you know I was coming here?"

Brooke shut the greenhouse door. He pointed through a dew-streaked pane at the dock. "See that little man with the black songkak hat?"

"Yeah?"

"He's from the Ministry of Islamic Banking. He just came from your *kampong,* looking for you. Big news from the gnomes of Zurich. You're hot property now, kid."

Turner folded his arms defiantly. "I've made my decision, Tuan Councilor. I threw it over. Everything. My family, the West . . . I don't want that money. I'm turning it down! I'm staying."

Brooke ignored him, wiping a patch of glass with his sleeve. "If they get their hooks into your cash flow, you'll never get out of here." Brooke glanced at him, alarmed. "You didn't sign anything, did you?"

Turner scowled. "You haven't heard a word I've said, have you?"

Brooke tugged at his hearing aid. "What? These damn batteries . . . Look, I got spares in my cabin. We'll check it out, have a talk." He waved Turner back, opened the greenhouse door slightly, and shouted a series of orders to the crew in their Dayak dialect. "Come on," he told Turner.

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They left by a second door, and sneaked across a patch of open deck, then down a flight of plywood steps into the center hull.

Brooke lifted the paisley bedspread of his cabin bunk and hauled out an ancient steamer chest. He pulled a jingling set of keys from his pocket and opened it. Beneath a litter of ruffled shirts, a shaving kit, and cans of hair spray, the trunk was packed to the gills with electronic contraband: coax cables, multiplexers, buffers and converters, shiny plug-in cards still in their heat-sealed baggies, multiplugged surge suppressors wrapped in tentacles of black extension cord. "Christ," Turner said. He heard a gentle thump as the ship came loose, followed by a rattle of rigging as the crew hoisted sail.

After a long search, Brooke found batteries in a cloisonné box. He popped them into place.

Turner said, "Admit it. You're surprised to see me, aren't you? Still think you were wrong about me?"

Brooke looked puzzled. "Surprised? Didn't you get Seria's message on the Net?"

"What? No. I slept on the docks last night."

"You missed the message?" Brooke said. He mulled it over. "Why are you here, then?"

"You said you could help me if I ever had money trouble," Turner said. "Well, now's the time. You gotta figure some way to get me out of this bank legacy. I know it doesn't look like it, but I've broken with my family for good. I'm gonna stay here, try to work things out with Seria."

Brooke frowned. "I don't understand. You want to stay with Seria?"

"Yes, here in Brunei, with her!" Turner sat on the bunk and waved his arms passionately. "Look, I know I told you that Brunei was just a glass bubble, sealed off from the world, and all that. But I've changed now! I've thought it through, I understand things. Brunei's important! It's small, but it's the ideas that matter, not the scale. I can get along, I'll fit in—you said so yourself."

"What about Seria?"

"Okay, that's part of it," Turner admitted. "I know she'll never leave this place. I can defy my family and it's no big deal, but she's Royalty. She wouldn't leave here, any more than you'd leave all your money behind. So you're both trapped here. All right. I can accept that." Turner looked up, his face glowing with determination. "I know things won't be easy for Seria and me, but it's up to me to make the sacrifice. Someone has to make the grand gesture. Well, it might as well be me."

Brooke was silent for a moment, then thumped him on the shoulder. "This is a new Turner I'm seeing. So you faced down the old smack merchant, huh? You're quite the hero!"

Turner felt sheepish. "Come on, Brooke."

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"And turning down all that nice money, too."

Turner brushed his hands together, dismissing the idea. "I'm sick of being manipulated by old geezers."

Brooke rubbed his unshaven jaw and grinned. "Kid, you've got a lot to learn." He walked to the door. "But that's okay, no harm done. Everything still works out. Let's go up on deck and make sure the coast is clear."

Turner followed Brooke to his deck chair by the bamboo railing. The ship sailed rapidly down a channel between mud flats. Already they'd left the waterfront, paralleling a shoreline densely fringed with mangroves. Brooke sat down and opened a binocular case. He scanned the city behind them.

Turner felt a lightheaded sense of euphoria as the triple bows cut the water. He smiled as they passed the first offshore rig. It looked like a good place to get some fishing done.

"About this bank," Turner said. "We have to face them some time—what good is this doing us?"

Brooke smiled without looking up from his binoculars. "Kid, I've been planning this day a long time. I'm running it on a wing and a prayer. But hey, I'm not proud, I can adapt. You've been a lot of trouble to me, stomping in where angels fear to tread, in those damn boots of yours. But I've finally found a way to fit you in. Turner, I'm going to retrofit your life."

"Think so?" Turner said. He stepped closer, looming over Brooke. "What are you looking for, anyway?"

Brooke sighed. "Choppers. Patrol boats."

Turner had a sudden terrifying flash of insight. "You're leaving Brunei. Defecting!" He stared at Brooke. "You bastard! You kept me on board!" He grabbed the rail, then began tearing at his heavy boots, ready to jump and swim for it.

"Don't be stupid!" Brooke said. "You'll get her in a lot of trouble!" He lowered the binoculars. "Oh Christ, here comes Omar."

Turner followed his gaze and spotted a helicopter, rising gnatlike over the distant high-rises. "Where is Seria?"

"Try the bow."

"You mean she's here? She's leaving too?" He ran forward across the thudding deck.

Seria wore bell-bottomed sailor's jeans and a stained nylon windbreaker. With the help of two of the Dayak crew, she was installing a meshwork satellite dish in an anchored iron plate in the deck. She had cut away her long dyed hair; she looked up at him, and for a moment he saw a stranger. Then her face shifted, fell into a familiar focus. "I thought I'd never see you again, Turner. That's why I had to do it."

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Turner smiled at her fondly, too overjoyed at first for her words to sink in. "Do what, angel?"

"Tap your phone, of course. I did it because I was jealous, at first. I had to be sure. You know. But then when I knew you were leaving, well, I had to hear your voice one last time. So I heard your talk with your Grandfather. Are you mad at me?"

"You tapped my phone? You heard all that?" Turner said.

"Yes, darling. You were wonderful. I never thought you'd do it."

"Well," Turner said, "I never thought you'd pull a stunt like this, either."

"Some had to make a grand gesture," she said. "It was up to me, wasn't it? But I explained all that in my message."

"So you're defecting? Leaving your family?" Turner knelt beside her, dazed. As he struggled to fit it all together, his eyes focussed on a cross-threaded nut at the base of the dish. He absently picked up a socket wrench. "Let me give you a hand with that," he said through reflex.

Seria sucked on a barked knuckle. "You didn't get my last message, did you? You came here on your own!"

"Well, yeah," Turner said. "I decided to stay. You know. With you."

"And now we're abducting you!" She laughed. "How romantic!"

"You and Brooke are leaving together?"

"It's not just me, Turner. Look."

Brooke was walking toward them, and with him Dr. Moratuwa, newly outfitted in saffron-colored baggy shorts and T-shirt. They were the work clothes of a Buddhist technician. "Oh, no," Turner said. He dropped his wrench with a thud.

Seria said, "Now you see why I had to leave, don't you? My family locked him up. I had to break *adat* and help Brooke set him free. It was my obligation, my *dharma!*"

"I guess that makes sense," Turner said. "But it's gonna take me a while, that's all. Couldn't you have warned me?"

"I tried to! I wrote you on the Net!" She saw he was crestfallen, and squeezed his hand. "I guess the plans broke down. Well, we can improvise."

"Good day, Mr. Choi," said Moratuwa. "It was very brave of you to cast in your lot with us. It was a gallant gesture."

"Thanks," Turner said. He took a deep breath. So they were all leaving. It was a shock, but he could deal with it. He'd just have to start over and think it through from a different angle. At least Seria was coming along.

He felt a little better now. He was starting to get it under control.

Moratuwa sighed. "And I wish it could have worked."

"Your brother's coming," Brooke told Seria gloomily. "Remember this was all my fault."

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They had a good headwind, but the crown prince's helicopter came on faster, its drone growing to a roar. A Gurkha palace guard crouched on the broad orange float outside the canopy, cradling a light machine gun. His gold-braided dress uniform flapped in the chopper's downwash.

The chopper circled the boat once. "We've had it," Brooke said. "Well, at least it's not a patrol boat with those damned Exocet missiles. It's family business with the princess on board. They'll hush it all up. You can always depend on *adat.*" He patted Moratuwa's shoulder. "Looks like you get a cellmate after all, old man."

Seria ignored them. She was looking up anxiously. "Poor Omar," she said. She cupped her hands to her mouth. "Brother, be careful!" she shouted.

The Prince's copilot handed the guard a loudspeaker. The guard raised it and began to shout a challenge.

The tone of the chopper's engines suddenly changed. Plumes of brown smoke billowed from the chromed exhausts. The prince veered away suddenly, fighting the controls. The guard, caught off balance, tumbled headlong into the ocean. The Dayak crew, who had been waiting for the order to reef sails, began laughing wildly.

"What in hell?" Brooke said.

The chopper pancaked down heavily into the bay, rocking in the ship's wake. Spurting caramel-colored smoke, its engines died with a hideous grinding. The ship sailed on. They watched silently as the drenched guard swam slowly up and clung to the chopper's float.

Brooke raised his eyes to heaven. "Lord Buddha, forgive my doubts. . . ."

"Sugar," Seria said sadly. "I put a bag of sugar in brother's fuel tank. I ruined his beautiful helicopter. Poor Omar, he really loves that machine."

Brooke stared at her, then burst into cackling laughter. Regally, Seria ignored him. She stared at the dwindling shore, her eyes bright. "Goodbye, Brunei. You cannot hold us now."

"Where are we going?" Turner said.

"To the West," said Moratuwa. "The Ocean Arks will spread for many years. I must set the example by carrying the word to the greatest global center of unsustainable industry."

Brooke grinned. "He means America, man."

"We shall start in Hawaii. It is also tropical and our expertise will find ready application there."

"Wait a minute," Turner said. "I turned my back on all that! Look, I turned down a fortune so I could stay in the East."

Seria took his arm, smiling radiantly. "You're such a dreamer, darling. What a wonderful gesture. I love you, Turner."

"Look," said Brooke, "I left behind my building, my title of nobility,

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and all my old mates. I'm older than you, so my romantic gestures come first."

"But," Turner said, "it was all decided. I was going to help you in Brunei. I had ideas, plans. Now none of it makes any sense."

Moratuwa smiled. "The world is not built from your blueprints, young man."

"Whose, then?" Turner demanded. "Yours?"

"Nobody's, really," Brooke said. "We all just have to do our best with whatever comes up. *Bricolage,* remember?" Brooke spread his hands. "But it's a geezer's world, kid. We got your number, and we got you outnumbered. Fast cars and future shock and that hot Western trip . . . that's another century. We like slow days in the sun. We like a place to belong and gentle things around us." He smiled. "Okay, you're a little wired now, but you'll calm down by the time we reach Hawaii. There's a lot of retrofit work there. You'll be one of us!" He gestured at the satellite dish. "We'll set this up and call your banks first thing."

"It's a good world for us, Turner," Seria said urgently. "Not quite East, not quite West—like us two. It was made for us, it's what we're best at." She embraced him.

"You escaped," Turner said. No one ever said much about what happened after Sleeping Beauty woke.

"Yes, I broke free," she said, hugging him tighter. "And I'm taking you with me."

Turner stared over her shoulder at Brunei, sinking into hot green mangroves and warm mud. Slowly, he could feel the truth of it, sliding over him like some kind of ambiguous quicksand. He was going to fit right in. He could see his future laid out before him, clean and predestined, like fifty years of happy machine language.

"Maybe I wanted this," he said at last. "But it sure as hell wasn't what I planned."

Brooke laughed. "Look, you're bound for Hawaii with a princess and eight million dollars. Somehow, you'll just have to make do." ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 73)

SECOND SOLUTION TO PUZZLES IN FLATLAND

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ON BOOKS by Baird Searles

Cuckoo's Egg
By C.J. Cherryh
Phantasia Press, $17.00

The prolific C.J. Cherryh's newest novel is problematical, but then Cherryh's novels always seem to be problematical. Lord knows, despite her prodigious output, she doesn't repeat herself. Nor does she make it easy for the reader—or the reviewer.

The immediate problem in *Cuckoo's Egg* is that it soon becomes obvious she is withholding a vital piece of information. We have an alien civilization, that of the Shonunin, which is very like humanity's though the Shonunin themselves are physically different. We have an alien, Duun, who is apparently someone of great importance, taking on the responsibility of rearing a child. The child is unmistakably human.

Duun takes the child to a country estate and rears him in the tradition of the *hatani*, a sort of philosophical warrior caste to which Duun belongs. In his teens, the human, Thorn, provokes an incident with the local Shonunin, who definitely view him as alien. Duun takes him to a city where he is educated with other Shonunin who also view him as alien. He chafes under the knowledge of his difference, but Duun will not tell him *why* he is different.

Nor does Cherryh tell the reader. Thus everything that happens revolves around that tantalizing mystery, which you know is the point of the book. Or *will* be. But until you find out, nothing makes too much sense.

Not until the very end, after Thorn's presence has precipitated a global, intercaste war, is the secret revealed. And it's certainly not for this reviewer to spill it. Is it worth beating your way through the novel for? Thorn's *hatani* discipline is something like training for the Zen Olympics and bogs the story down into a sort of Chariots of Mire at times, and there's a good deal of conversation. Thorn tends toward a lot of parenthetical introspection to boot. As we've noted before, Cherryh's many readers don't seem to mind this sort of thing. Others could well find it tedious.

Requiem For A Ruler of Worlds
By Brian Daley
Del Rey Books, $3.50 (paper)

The will is about to be read, and of the many possible beneficiaries, no one knows who will get what,

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if anything, of the estate. They gather, with their tangled motives, hopes, and ambitions. And there is always at least one villain in the lot, determined to get more than his/her share; there is always the chance, in fact, that the departed was done in by the villain.

That's always an exciting situation—in fiction, at least—and a classic one. And when the deceased is Caspahr Weir, who had risen from slavery to become the ruler of nineteen star systems and who has made bequests across the multicultural/racial galaxy, the possibilities are infinite.

Brian Daley hasn't quite realized all of them in his *Requiem For a Ruler of Worlds*, but the results are nevertheless a thoroughly diverting novel. It's the "Third Breath" of mankind—there have been two interstellar Dark Ages. One of the events of the last one was a human-alien war that left Earth nearly in ruins.

The culture that has developed there since then is practically Orwellian. It is regimented and controlled (thought and otherwise) by a power elite who have conditioned the citizenry into extreme xenophobia. Off-worlders, even descendents of human colonists, are anything but welcome, though a few manage to beat their way through the red tape to visit the birthworld of mankind as tourists.

One of these is Alacrity Fitzhugh, a jaunty young spacer who almost immediately finds himself set up on a murder charge on dear old Terra. Seems that one of its most mundane citizens, Hobart Floyt, has been named a beneficiary in Weir's will, much to everyone's astonishment. Since Terrans have no experience at going offworld at all, and since by law the government is entitled to most of what Hobart has inherited, the powers that be are most interested that he get to Epiphany, where the will is to be read, and back. Alacrity is offered the chance to be Hobart's guide through the wilds of the Galaxy. Both are hastily conditioned to fulfill the mission.

So the odd couple set off on a highly amusing journey, spiced by the provincial Hobart's struggles to adjust to the varied manners and mores of sinful Luna, highly sophisticated Epiphany, and various stops and vessels in between. There is also the not-so-minor matter that somebody is out to get Hobart.

Daley is a sometimes slapdash writer, and it takes a while to get all the pieces of the plot in motion. But once he gets going, getting there is more than half the fun. He has an endless talent for the daft detail, such as that the big gambling game among the crew of the Epiphany-bound interstellar vessel is Monopoly. The game's effect on an alien from Hyperbole whose culture's main imperative is acquiring territory provides one of many delicious moments.

Stand warned: this is the first of a series. I can reveal that Hobart finds out in due course *what* he has

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inherited. Getting hold of it is another matter . . .

The Curse of the Giant Hogweed
By Charlotte MacLeod
Crime Club, $11.95

A "Magical Mystery Tour" is the only way one can describe Charlotte MacLeod's *The Curse of the Giant Hogweed.* It's a mystery, a whodunit in the classic sense. It's magical because it takes place in legendary Wales, with griffins, hags, transformed knights, and what all. And the tour takes us through various nasty caves, down streams in enchanted coracles, and to castles thoroughly inhabited by brawling, scheming royalties not above using physical as well as magical means to get what they want.

MacLeod is a successful writer of mysteries; this latest novel is another adventure of Professor Peter Shandy, mild-mannered botanist, who has solved crimes up to now in the relatively mundane reaches of present-day Massachusetts.

Summoned to Wales to help cope with an extreme emergency, the proliferation of the giant hogweed, he and two fellow-American academics stop in a quaint old pub and with no more fuss than walking into the bar, suddenly find themselves in the past—the Wales of mythology, in fact. Their first encounter is with a hulking young knight, Torchyld, who has been told not to come back to the castle until he's found his King-uncle's pet griffin, one Ffyffnyr, who has disappeared along with Torchyld's affianced, Lady Syglinde.

Things go from mad to worse —and the only clues these poor academic Americans have as to what's happening are half-remembered fantasies they've read to their nieces and nephews. (They assume with surprising equanimity that the pub is just the local equivalent of a wardrobe or a rabbit hole.) After a few adventures, such as an encounter with a cannibal enchantress and the trip in the enchanted coracle (which, in accord with tradition, comes with a well-equipped lunch basket), they indeed find the griffin (who has the personality of an endearing St. Bernard) and return with Torchyld to the castle, just in time to get the news that the second in line to the throne has been killed in a hunting accident.

Peter, of course, realizes it's murder. He and his companions pass themselves off as druids (which means some embarrassing moments of officiating at various ceremonies), and set out to solve it in the best time-honored fashion. It's certainly not often a contemporary detective gets to sleuth a whole royal family, and include among the motives a desire for the throne (modern royalty just isn't any fun any more).

Who put the mickey in the megathlin? Who stole the silver hawk's bell from the wyvern's hoard? Why was the door in the haunted tower in which Syglinde was imprisoned

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barred with a wooden stick instead of the perfectly good iron bolt to hand? And, of course, all is revealed at a gathering of everyone involved, which in this case is the victim's state funeral, which the "druids" conduct in their own peculiar fashion ("Abide With Me" on the harp and a recitation of "Mad Carew").

Cutesy medieval fantasies are a dime a dozen these days, but MacLeod, despite the subject matter, writes in a mystery writer's style, and that makes a difference. I'd be hard put to define it, but part of it is that all the characters take a lot for granted, not much time is spent explaining anything (except the mystery), and logic doesn't have much to do with what's going on (except, of course, in solving the crime).

She also has her characters from the past speaking in a sort of pseudomedieval argot which is pretty funny: "So I asked him how was I supposed to wot?" and "It be not ye done thing" are among the saner examples. Despite the difference in style, I was strongly reminded of the classic *The Incomplete Enchanter* by De Camp and Pratt. Here again we have a hardheaded but easygoing contemporary American coping with the legendary past in all its unhygienic and superstitious "reality"; I guess the genre goes at least as far back as *A Connecticut Yankee*. Whatever (or whenever), when it works, it's a delight. This one worketh.

Pandora's Genes
By Kathryn Lance
Popular Library, $2.95 (paper)

Pandora's Genes is an intelligent, smoothly written novel that has one simple problem (besides its title, which I irreverently continue to read as *Pandora's Jeans*). It's very like any number of intelligent, smoothly written novels that have appeared in the past few years.

Does it take place in a post-disaster future?

Check.

Has society been reduced to an agrarian anarchy of ignorant peasants?

Check.

Is said peasantry against science because it has brought on not only the downfall of civilization but continuing genetic problems?

Check.

Are there new species of animal life that are (choose one) virulently menacing? Unusually intelligent? Just plain weird?

Check, check, check.

Are the leading characters involved in trying to restore order from the chaos?

Check.

Is there an "elite" order of intelligentsia trying to restore science despite the opposition of the rabble?

Check.

Do the leading characters have moral and emotional problems stemming from ethics inherited from the old days which conflict

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with the violent measures that have to be taken to revive some sort of societal coherence?

Check.

Are books rare and treasured items?

Check.

There's nothing wrong in not being totally original; almost no author is. But the more that a certain type of story appears, the more the handling of it has to be fresh in some way. Intelligence is just not enough; adequate writing talent is just not enough.

The disaster in *Pandora's Genes* is a meddling with the DNA of certain bacteria which were to clean up oil spills, and ended up cleaning up all the oil everywhere as well as everything else made from petroleum. Various other genetic experiments let loose other new species, as well as an inherited "sickness" in human women in which the birth of a second daughter results in the death of mother and child.

The leading characters are a likeable lot whose conflicts rise from the best of motives. "The Principal" is a man struggling mightily to restore a viable social order from the remains of Washington, D.C.; his brother Zach is an independent sort whose objections to the Principal's one major character fault, a weakness for mistreating young girls, leads him to rescue one such. He takes the girl Evvy to "the Garden," an enclave of female knowledge-seekers who are attempting to eradicate the inherited female "sickness" which continues to reduce the population. Evvy grows up to continue this work, and we follow the trio through rivalries and disagreements over principles.

The heavies are the Traders, a religious cult from the West who actively oppose any revival of science and burn books as part of their religious ceremonies. And there are murderous killer bats and empathetic "fox-cats" that liven the action here and there.

Readable but familiar?

Check.

The Devil On the Road
By Robert Westall
Tempo, $2.25 (paper)

Maybe Americans should just give up writing fantasy altogether. Oh, we have our competent fantasists, and a few exceptional practiioners of the art, but the British so consistently come up with beautifully wrought and original works that it's enough to give one a case of national defensiveness.

Take Robert Westall's *The Devil On the Road*, for instance. Buried way down underneath it is a familiar idea. How many idiot movies and lumpen novels have you seen/read about the unwary traveler who stumbles on a rural remnant of witchcraft? But, oh what Westall does with it!

John Webster is a civil engineering student in London and an ardent motorcyclist. On vacation, he takes off, leaving it totally to chance as to where he will end up.

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Chance, in the form of traffic jams and other roadway impedimenta and finally a furious thunderstorm, ends him up in a barn in the backwoods of Suffolk, after a stop to take part in a sort of creatively anachronisitc restaging of a battle between Roundheads and Cavaliers (a very funny number, as John tells it).

In the barn, he finds an oddly-dressed man trying to kill a kitten; in defending it, he is knocked out, and when he comes to, finds no evidence of the fight. The kitten is there, however. The owner of the barn, a gentleman farmer, finds him, takes him to his house to mend, and tries to persuade him to stay on, offering to pay him and make him comfortable in the barn, which is an ancient one.

John does so, from a curious combination of inertia, attachment to the kitten, and other factors he is not really aware of. Then odd things begin to happen: the villagers and farm laborers treat him with immense respect and start to come to him for cures; offerings are left at the barn door; and he begins to trip in time, to the sixteenth century, the period of Cromwell and the witch hunts.

These excursions are seemingly connected to the kitten, somehow, who is always to hand when they happen.

Things get very complex, but at the core of the matter is a witch trial involving the local squire, a young woman of the aristocracy who is indeed a witch, and the notorious Witch Finder General of England, Matthew Hopkins. Most authors would have stopped when John succeeds in rescuing the witch by a complicated fugal manipulation of time; *The Devil On the Road* continues the surprises as Johanna returns with John to the 20th century.

Besides its originality, other things make the novel a winner. John, as revealed in his first person narration, is a funny, quirky, intelligent hero, cynically modern, and yet thoroughly bemused at what's happening to him. And Westall is quite a writer. About an antique bed: "It smelled of damp and mildew, cowdung and lavender. And it was full of ghosts whispering and making love, and screaming in childbirth and poisoning and dying . . . Middle-aged people go on and on about how dangerous motorbikes are; they should've tried that bed."

Maybe the problem is that we Yanks just don't have enough 400-year-old beds around yet to inspire us.

The Instrumentality of Mankind
By Cordwainer Smith
Del Rey, $2.95 (paper)

One was beginning to worry that Cordwainer Smith was becoming a forgotten writer: his books out of print; none of the younger readers knowing who he was; that sort of thing. Fifteen years ago he was the favorite author of science fiction's intelligentsia—which may have been the problem.

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In any case, it is more than a pleasure to welcome *The Instrumentality of Mankind* back into print. Smith (in reality Paul Linebarger) died in 1966 after having lived one of the most remarkable lives of any author in the field, the details of which are much too complex and varied to go into here. He also, in the subtlest possible way, revolutionized science fiction with a curious synthesis of intelligence, poetic imagination, and writing style that both set a standard and inspired other writers. Ursula K. Le Guin has said that after reading her first story by Smith, her reaction was (or ought to have been) "*My God, it can be done!*"

Instrumentality consists of a series of stories set (mostly) in the time of the Lords of the Instrumentality, who rule the many worlds of mankind. The ingredients of the long history of the Instrumentality universe are many: the scanners, humans restructured to be able to travel in space (one of the earliest uses of an SF theme that has become pervasive); planoforming on great estate-sized ships that get you from *here* to *there* almost immediately; and the numerous characters of the Underpeople, animals raised to human intelligence, whose battle for rights is an ongoing theme, are just a few of Smith's memorable inventions.

Smith's only novel, *Norstrilia* (also set in the Instrumentality universe), and *The Best of Cordwainer Smith* (edited by J.J. Pierce and containing a valuable overview of Instrumentality history) have also just been reprinted from the same publisher. It's certainly time to get acquainted (or reacquainted, for that matter) with Cordwainer Smith.

Shoptalk . . . The success of the *Thieves' World* series has inspired other such publishing ventures, which might be described as the everybody-into-the-pool school of anthologizing. For those who've missed it, this consists of a central idea (usually a place such as a planet) around which a number of authors will each build a story, all coordinated by an editor who, we hope, has a good head for detail. Recent examples include:

Liavek, edited by Emma Bull and Will Shetterly with stories by Gene Wolfe, Barry Longyear, Steven Brust, Patricia Wrede, Jane Yolen et al., includes a Tourist's Guide to the world of Liavek (Ace, $2.95, paper). *Magic In Ithkar* edited by Andre Norton and Robert Adams (or the Horse Clans meet the Witch World) has contributions by Morgan Llywelyn, Ms. Norton, and the omnipresent C.J. Cherryh, among others (Tor, $6.95, paper). *Berserker Base*, described as a "collaborative novel" about Fred Saberhagen's thoroughly unpleasant Berserkers (mechanical thingies programmed to destroy all life), in which the collaborators are Saberhagen, Poul Anderson, Edward Bryant, Larry Niven, Connie Willis, and Roger Zelazny (Tor, $6.95, paper). *Medea: Harlan's World*, ed-

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ited by Harlan Ellison and chronicled by Anderson, Niven, Hal Clement, Thomas M. Disch, Frank Herbert, Frederik Pohl, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, Kate Wilhelm, and Jack Williamson (could this be called a mass *Medea?*) (Bantam, $9.95, paper). Apologies if I left anyone out.

Barry Hughart's wonderfully original piece of fantastic *chinoiserie, Bridge of Birds*, reviewed in this space a year or so ago, is now available in paperback (Del Rey, $2.95, paper)... There's a new edition of *A History of the Hugo, Nebula, and International Fantasy Awards* by Howard DeVore and Donald Franson. Very detailed, it lists nominees as well as winners and is an invaluable reference (Howard DeVore, $6.00, paper, postpaid from DeVore, 4705 Weddel St., Dearborn, Michigan 48125)... The insidious Dr. Fu Manchu has been totally inscrutable for five years or so—out of print, in other words. Fans of Sax Rohmer and his yellow peril will be overjoyed to hear that he's scrutable again; the series is reappearing, beginning with *The Trail of Fu Manchu* and *The Drums of Fu Manchu*, with quite handsome covers (Zebra, $3.50 each, paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014. ●

NEXT ISSUE

Multiple Hugo award winner George R. R. Martin returns to *IAsfm* for the first time in three years with a powerful cover novelette, "Portraits of His Children." We'll also have short stories by Isaac Asimov, Tanith Lee, Jane Yolen, and others, and Norman Spinrad will devote his book review column to a look at science fiction books that have been made into movies. Look for this issue on September 24, 1985 at your newsstand.

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

With the WorldCon over, the Fall convention season can get underway in earnest. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a later, longer list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send an SASE when writing cons. Early evening is often the best time to phone. Look for me at cons behind the big, iridescent "Filthy Pierre" badge, playing a musical keyboard.

AUGUST, 1985

22-26—**AussieCon 2.** For info, write: **11863 W. Jefferson Blvd. #1, Culver City CA 90230.** Or phone: **(703) 273-6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Melbourne, Australia (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Southern Cross. Guests will include: many. WorldCon.

23-25—**BabelCon.** Airport Hilton, Grand Rapids MI. Artist Phil Foglio. Masquerade. Media con.

23-25—**BuboniCon.** Shalako Motor Inn, Albuquerque NM. Fred Saberhagen, Gordon Garb. Relaxed con.

24-25—**UniCon.** Hyogo County Hall, near Osaka, Japan. Limited to 500 members (tiny, for Japan).

30-Sep. 1—**Triangulum.** Mark Plaza, Milwaukee WI. Harlan Ellison, David Gerrold. A new con.

30-Sep. 2—**ChiliCon.** Hyatt Regency, Austin TX. The NASFIC for 1985. Join at the door for $70.

SEPTEMBER, 1985

6-8—**CopperCon, Box 11743, Phoenix AZ 85061. (602) 252-8114.** Rest after WorldCon. Nancy Springer.

10-15—**French Nat'l Con. % Vopalieo SF, 26 Sq. des Anciennes Provinces, 49000 Angers, France. Tel. (41) 68-40-15.** Note the dates have changed yet again. Best check to confirm before traveling.

20-22—**MosCon, Box 8521, Moscow ID 83843. (208) 882-1611.** John Varley, artist Rick Sternbach, fan Richard Wright. Jacuzzi party, masquerade dance, Lensman awards, Sunday brunch, dead cow party.

21-22—**ValleyCon 10, Box 7202, Fargo ND 58111.** Patricia Wrede. Costume, pun & trivia contests.

OCTOBER, 1985

4-6—**Contradiction, % Pepe, 147 Huntington Ave., Buffalo NY 14214.** Niagara Falls. Nancy Kress, Patricia McKillip, Judith Merril. Chocolate symposium & pigout, Batsu breakfast club, masquerade.

11-13—**WindyCon, Box 432, Chicago IL 60690.** C. J. Cherryh, Algis Budrys, artist Todd Hamilton.

11-13—**NotJustAnotherCon, % U. Mass. SF Society, RSO Box 104, U. of Mass., Amherst MA 01003**

12-14—**NonCon, % Gillies, 4912 54th #305, Red Deer AB T4N 2G8, Canada.** John Varley, fan Steve Forty, Lorna Toomis. Sunday brunch, Jacuzzi party. This con moves around Alberta from year to year.

19-20—**FallCon, 1122 W. Univ. Av., Gainesville FL 32601. (904) 374-8593.** Piers Anthony, D. Sim.

19-20—**FantastiCon, Box 781, Red Bluff CA 96080. (916) 529-2636.** Redding CA. R. Faraday Nelson, R. Bretnor, Dean Ing, David Gerrold, Bob Vardeman, S. Sucharitkul, etc. Quite a lineup. Unbanquet.

25-27—**MileHiCon, Box 27074, Denver CO 80227. (303) 934-7659/936-4092.** Sucharitkul, Ed Bryant.

AUGUST, 1986

28-Sep. 1—**ConFederation, 2500 N. Atlantic #1986, Smyrna GA 30080. (404) 438-3943.** Atlanta GA. Ray Bradbury, fan/editor Terry Carr, B. (Slow Glass) Shaw. The WorldCon for 1986, back in the USA.

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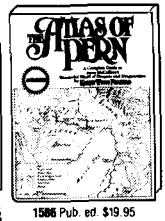

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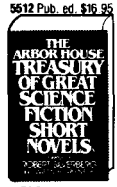

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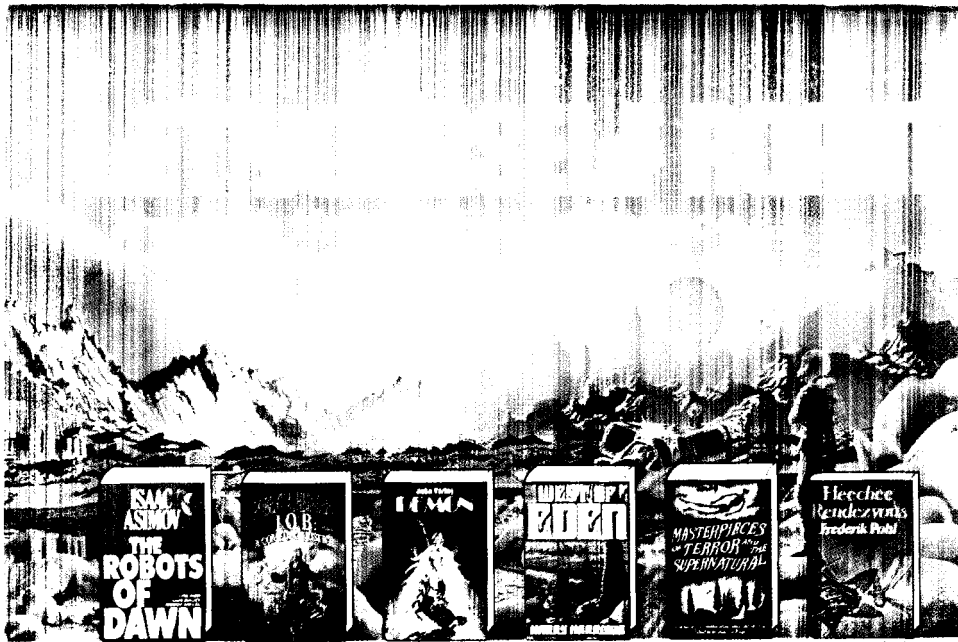

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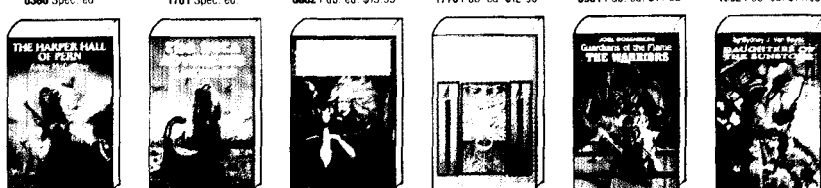

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